

PC game industry continues to grow, expand

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The video-game market for personal computers continues to grow into a key market in the computer industry.

Users in the United States spent \$1.4 billion on video games for PCs in 2005, according to research released by analysts NPD Group this week.

Of that, \$344 million came from subscriptions to online games and gaming Web sites, according to NPD's estimate.

Meanwhile, Verizon Games, purveyor of several online gaming options, has partnered with Super Computer International Inc. to create a new model for gaming servers.

"Verizon's relationship with SCI will help us speed the development and distribution of an advanced online gaming platform with capabilities that we believe no other game messenger currently delivers," Mitch Dornich, group product manager for new product development at Verizon, said in a news release.

"We're bringing together Verizon's strengths in broadband, the Internet, communications and mass marketing with SCI's state-of-the-art gaming technologies and expertise to create an entirely new experience for the online gaming community," he added.

"We're excited to be joining forces with Verizon," said Jesper Jenson, SCI's chief executive officer. "The platforms we are devising will reset the standards and expectations of online game players while simplifying

and accelerating their ability to build highly customizable gaming communities and personalized social networks."

Jason Henderson, games product manager for Verizon, said that Verizon and SCI's partnership is leading to the creation of a new way to play multiplayer online games.

"Instead of renting a server for a month for \$100, it's a totally different model," he said.

Instead, with Verizon's PlayLinc platform, users will be able to rent a temporary piece of a Verizon server to play a particular game.

"Out there in the world, people who play multiplayer titles do them one way: They go find a server hosted publicly," Henderson said. "They have very little control over how to access it."

"With Verizon, I can set up a game however I want to play, and send a message to my friends through an AOL Instant Messenger-based chat client," he said.

Henderson said that the service fits Verizon's overall goal of developing communication infrastructure.

"Our interest in games is oriented in how we can facilitate our users playing with one another and communicating," he said. "It's about more than continuing to build broadband subscriptions for Verizon."

Verizon spokesman Bobbi Henson agreed.

"It gives us the capability of generating new revenue streams," she said. "But it also allows us to establish and grow relationships with a whole new set of people."

Verizon will begin publicly using PlayLinc in beta form next month, when they organize a free tournament for the game "Half-Life 2: Death Match." The tournament's winner will receive \$100,000.

"'Half-Life 2: Death Match' is a game that's not heavily used," Henderson said. "So the winner can be someone random, not a professional player."

Henderson said the gaming industry is looking at other ways to develop in addition to new technologies.

"We're going to see a lot of movement in different directions," he said. "The game industry continues to mature."

The gaming industry is trying to determine how to create an after-market for games once they're past their release period, Henderson said, such as how the movie industry sells DVDs of old films.

"Verizon is going to be very much at the forefront of figuring out how to market old titles in ways that are new," he said. "We need to find new ways to package them to appeal to a different audience. My goal is to keep blurring the line between casual and hardcore gamers."

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