

Tech File: Sony's Playstation Portable

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Image: Howard Stringer holds up a PlayStation Portable

Tech File caught up with Peter Dille, senior vice president of marketing at Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc., to grill him about the future of Sony's portable multimedia device the PlayStation Portable (PSP). With recent announcements that Hollywood studios are pulling out or cutting back on the UMD movie format and complaints from gamers about the lack of games, we thought it'd be a good time to get an update on the system.

Q. What is Sony's ultimate goal for the PSP?

A. As the market leader in interactive entertainment in the home, we wanted to offer consumers a product that lived up to the PlayStation brand with the added freedom of taking that experience wherever, whenever. PSP (PlayStation Portable) does just that, providing an unrivaled gaming system to consumers on the go, complemented by rich,

multimedia functionality, including videos, music, photos, Internet and wireless connectivity.

Q. How does the recent announcement that major Hollywood studios will be cutting back on UMD movies affect the PSP?

A. SCEA has been providing the Hollywood studios with data on the PSP consumer, both from a demographic and psychographic point of view, in an effort for them to better tailor their product offering to this new and emerging market. As such, we have seen studios cutting back on releasing their full content on UMD, as unlike the DVD market, the PSP consumer is targeted. We are committed to helping the studios better understand our product and our consumer, and will continue to educate them as we evolve and enhance the functionality of the PSP.

Q. What is Sony's response to the common complaint that there aren't enough original or innovative titles on the PSP?

A. Looking back a year after the launch, we've seen developers take full advantage of the PSP's capabilities with games built specifically for the system. For example, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo, which has sold more than half a million copies, offers innovative PlayStation 2 "crosstalk" functionality, while Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories, which has surpassed the million mark, features a brand-new storyline and various multi-player modes. And if you look at the excitement around the titles we showed at E3 in May, like LocoRoco and its creative use of the PSP controls, it's a great time to be a PSP owner. Smart third parties also recognize the great success achieved with games tailored from the ground up for the PSP. For example, this fall EA is publishing PSP-specific versions of its popular Def Jam, Medal of Honor and Godfather franchises. Publishers and developers alike see the value of the system and its installed base, and they're meeting user demand with several titles on the horizon that gamers can't wait to get

their hands on and play.

Q. Will future firmware upgrades improve the PSP's music capabilities by including support for playing music in random/shuffle modes?

A. While we have nothing to announce today about additional music capabilities, Sony Computer Entertainment is committed to continuing to build on the functionality of the PSP system. To date, we've developed seven firmware upgrades that help users get more from the device, from expanding the types of music file formats supported to making TV programs recorded with a TiVo available for viewing on a PSP. We will continue to look at ways to enhance the consumer experience going forward via additional updates.

Q. Can you tell us a little bit about the upcoming GPS and Camera additions?

A. The GPS and camera accessories are slated for release later this year. We're excited about the potential to incorporate this functionality into innovative gaming applications and will have more details to share in the future.

Q. The DS is currently getting all of the buzz and hype, what do you think Sony can do to get people talking more about the PSP?

A. In North America, the PSP has outsold all next-generation handhelds since we launched in March 2005, with more than 4.7 million units sold. In May, according to NPD data, the PSP was the top-selling portable handheld at nearly 160,000 units. We're pleased with the success the PSP has achieved, and the next step is to build on that success with our core gaming audience to reach a wider mass market audience. One key finding in our market research is that many consumers don't understand everything the PSP can do. So starting this summer, we're embarking on

a major marketing campaign to educate consumers about the multi-functionality of the PSP beyond gaming. It's a powerful device in a portable package, and this effort will help us continue the momentum that made PSP the No. 1 selling system in its class last year.

Q. Can you talk a little about how the PSP will be used with the PS3?

A. We gave some hints at our E3 press conference, including the example we showed using the PSP as a real-time rear-view mirror in the racing game, F1. That's just scratching the surface of what we can do when we link up these two powerful platforms. Ultimately it's in the hands of the development community to create new and exciting ways that tie the systems together. As we get closer to the PS3 launch, we'll have some additional examples to share.

Q. What can you tell us about the new back catalog download program and Playstation 1 emulation on the PSP?

A. We'll offer a new emulator to enable users to play select PSone titles on the PSP. The games will be distributed digitally and downloadable to a Memory Stick Duo. The final selection of games will be announced later this year.

Q. How about your deal to make PSP downloadable content available in places retail and fast-food chains?

A. We haven't announced any deals along these lines, but with the type and amount of downloadable content available for the PSP growing exponentially every day, our goal is to offer this content in as many places as possible. We already offer this content on the official PSP Web site (psp.us.playstation.com), and we're looking at various initiatives to offer downloadable content in new and exciting areas. We'll have more to announce on these efforts in the future.

Q. What happened with the rumors of a PSP redesign and portable hard drive?

A. As a policy, we don't comment on rumors or speculation.

Q. How hard is it to market the device, when you have to speak to three different audiences (movie lovers, gamers, and music lovers?)

A. The PSP was the industry's best-selling next-generation handheld in 2005, which underscores its marketability. It's our fastest growing format ever, and we've had a lot of momentum marketing the device to consumers since launch last March, when more than half a million units sold in the first two days. Consumers vote with their wallets, and based on sales figures, the PSP has proven to be the device of choice for people who want to play console-quality games -- and watch movies, view photos, listen to music, and connect to the Internet.

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