

'Halo 3' Beta Test Gets off to Rough Start

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Microsoft Corp.'s public test of its upcoming "Halo 3" video game got off to a rocky start on Wednesday after many users found they were unable to try out the science fiction-themed shooter.

Owners of Microsoft's Xbox 360 console were supposed to be able to participate in the public test, or beta, of the game by downloading a code included with "Crackdown," another Xbox 360 game published by Microsoft in February.

The public test began on Wednesday, but many users reported trouble downloading the code to join, prompting "Halo 3" developer Bungie Studios to say it was working with Microsoft's Xbox Live online gaming service to fix the trouble.

Microsoft said the problem was not due to "Crackdown" or the beta itself, but declined to offer more details.

"We know that we have a lot of fans that have been waiting for the beta for months, and even took time off of work to start early today. We really appreciate their enthusiasm, and we hope the small delay won't dampen everyone's enjoyment of the game," the company said in a statement.

"Halo 3" is one of the most anticipated games of the year and Microsoft is counting on it to drive sales of the Xbox 360 and strengthen its position against Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s Wii.

"Halo 2" racked up \$125 million in sales in its first 24 hours of availability when it was released in 2004. The first two "Halo" games have sold a combined 11 million units, according to Microsoft.

A counter on Bungie's site said more than 8,000 people were playing "Halo 3" on Wednesday afternoon and that more than 51,000 people had played the game in the last 24 hours.

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