

DSi adds cameras, downloads to Nintendo's portable

April 7 2009, By LOU KESTEN , Associated Press Writer



In this video screen image released by Nintendo, a scene from "Brain Age Express: Math" is shown. (AP Photo/Nintendo)

(AP) -- When Nintendo introduced its portable DS system in 2004, many longtime fans were skeptical. Its innovations - the dual screens, the stylus-based controls, the built-in microphone - seemed gimmicky. How could this clunky slab ever replace the beloved Game Boy?

Five years and 100 million units later, no one doubts that [Nintendo](#) knew what it was doing. The second version of the hardware, the slender DS Lite, has been particularly popular; in December, Nintendo sold 3 million in the United States, breaking the one-month sales record for any video-game console.

So it's almost foolish to quibble with Nintendo when it comes to portable

gaming. The new DSi (\$169.99) has some features I love and some I can live without, but there's no denying it's a nifty piece of hardware.

The most visible change is the addition of two still cameras, one facing toward the user, once facing away. The cameras are low-resolution, but they serve their purpose, allowing you to take photos and manipulate them. You can distort faces, add colors and graffiti, morph two faces together or create a kaleidoscope effect.

The DSi Sound application is less inventive. It lets you take voice or music files and change their speed and pitch, or add assorted effects, like a trumpet or an electric fan. I suspect kids will have a lot more fun making goofy faces with the camera than creating annoying sounds with the microphone.

In the long run, the most significant element of the DSi will be its ability to download software from the Internet. In this respect, Nintendo is playing catch-up to Sony's PlayStation Portable - and certainly reacting to the threat posed by Apple's [iPhone](#), whose App Store has gotten a lot of people used to the idea of downloading games.

Nintendo's DSiWare only has five games at launch, and none of them are essential. For \$2, you can purchase "Master of Illusion Express: Funny Face," a cheesy magic trick, or "Bird & Beans," a needless extension of one of the five-second microgames in the "WarioWare" series.

For \$5 you can get "Art Style: Aquia," an unusually difficult color-matching [game](#). Or you can get "WarioWare: Snapped!," which uses the cameras but only works in optimum light - a problem if you're playing on the go.

Finally, "Brain Age Express: Math," which recycles the math problems of the original "Brain Age" games, will set you back \$8.

The DSi does play the hundreds of DS cartridges that are already on the market. Best of the recent releases: Nintendo's "Rhythm Heaven," Electronic Arts' "Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure," Rockstar's "Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars," D3's "Puzzle Quest: Galactrix" and PopCap's "Peggle Dual Shot."

Of course, you could play all those on a \$129.99 DS Lite. But if you don't have a Nintendo portable, the DSi may be worth the extra \$40 - once the DSiWare offerings get up to speed.

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