

Ubisoft steps up videogame fitness with virtual coach

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Renelly Morel (R), digital marketing manager for Ubisoft, works out with Your Shape on November 6, in San Francisco. French videogame powerhouse Ubisoft will have a virtual fitness coach whipping Wii users into shape. "Your Shape" ramp-up the healthy videogame genre by using a camera to put people on-screen and under the scrutiny of an animated coach devoted to making workouts go strong.

French videogame powerhouse Ubisoft will have a virtual fitness coach whipping Wii users into shape starting Tuesday.

"Your Shape" ramps up the healthy videogame genre with a custom camera that puts people on-screen and under the scrutiny of an animated coach devoted to making workouts go strong.

"This is a great way to personalize a [fitness](#) experience," Ubisoft senior vice president of sales and marketing Tony Key told AFP while providing an early glimpse at the videogame in San Francisco.

"We feel we have a great opportunity to take the fitness game to the next level with the camera."

Ubisoft cameras plug into [Nintendo Wii](#) videogame consoles so people can see themselves work out and an animated version of Playboy-model-turned-actress Jenny McCarthy can be a coach, leading routines and encouraging proper form.

Each copy of the videogame will be packaged with a camera and carry a price tag of 70 dollars.

Ubisoft's previous fitness games for the [Wii](#) require players to use balance boards made by Nintendo. The boards, similar in size and shape to bathroom scales, sense weight and balance.

"It's a completely different approach than what the [balance board](#) offers," Key said. "The camera is putting you on the screen and analyzing your movement next to the coach."

During a test of the game by AFP "virtual Jenny" coaxed a player through an aerobics routine, quickly correcting missteps and even offering to take breaks to practice vexing moves.

The game quickly elevated pulse and perspiration. "My Shape" is programmed with more than 500 exercises and lets people customize workouts to suit fitness goals.

"You pick what you want to fix, whether it's 'My arms are too flabby'...'My butt is too big'...'My gut is too flabby," Key said. "It turns

out fitness is really desirable."

[Ubisoft](#) is unabashedly targeting women with "Your Shape," saying it is due to the success Wii consoles had in winning over Moms who had once shunned videogame consoles as sloth-inducing diversions rife with virtual mayhem.

Wii consoles with revolutionary motion-sensing controllers geared for family-oriented games became marketplace hits after their launch in 2006.

"Moms used to hate games and say that kids would sit on the couch and get fat," said Billy Pidgeon of Game Changer Research. "Nintendo turned around the perception of moms."

Nintendo's own Wii Fit exercise videogames are a mult-billion-dollar franchise, according to Pidgeon.

"Mom is basically the CEO of the house," Key said. "Healthy gaming is a boon for our industry, because it gets approved by Mom."

"Your Shape" is a promising entry in a fast-growing videogame category of "active" titles that get players up and moving, according to Scott Steinberg, lead videogame analyst for DigitalTrends.com

"As the latest high-profile trailblazer for a new breed of lifestyle-relevant videogames designed to appeal to everyday shoppers at large, it's helping to broaden gaming's appeal as a whole," Steinberg said.

"This is the type of game we need more of to help erase old stereotypes," he said. "Whether or not -- like so many Wii Balance Boards -- it ultimately winds up collecting dust mere days after the turkey's tossed out or Christmas lights come down."

Nintendo intends to design other games that take advantage of the camera's ability to put Wii players into on-screen action.

"We aren't going to stop with just fitness games," Key said. "We are going to leverage the camera technology to make all sorts of products. You can certainly do dancing games and let the computer be the judge."

"Your Shape" could also help revive sales of Wii consoles, which have cooled with tough economic conditions and a dearth of hot titles.

Nintendo trimmed the price of Wii consoles to 199 dollars a few months ago in the face of slowing sales.

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