

Nine gaming predictions for 2010

December 11 2009, By Kyle Orland

The end of the year offers a chance to look back on all that's come and gone in the past 12 months. It also offers a chance to use that knowledge of the past to bet on the outcome of the next 12 months for fun and profit.

To that end, I've taken a look at the larger trends in the [game industry](#) in 2009 and extrapolated them into predictions for 2010. With this list, I tried not to make vague guesses about the direction of the industry, but rather offer up concrete, testable hypotheses that can be evaluated at the end of the year. For each prediction, I've also offered up odds showing how confident I am in each prediction (betting against me at 2:1 means I pay one if I'm wrong, you pay two if I'm right), so that in a year's time, we can see if you'd have been better off betting with me or against me. (I know setting odds on my own predictions is a bit unfair, but I tried to come up with offers that would get a fair set of bids on both sides.)

Enough chitchat; here's the list. See you in a year!

1. [Nintendo Wii](#) sales will decline year over year in North America.

Part of this prediction is based on the simple idea that the Wii has nowhere to go but down, after dominating the North American sales charts for so long. With the system recently dropping from \$250 to an even friendlier \$200, I have to believe that everyone who really wants a Wii will have already bought one by the end of this holiday season. But this prediction is also driven by the fact that Sony and [Microsoft](#) are making a serious push for the market niche Nintendo has carved out _

with lower prices, upcoming motion controllers and a marketing focus on family-friendly gaming. This doesn't mean I think those companies' systems will pass the Wii in yearly or even monthly sales, but unless Nintendo has some new gimmick up its sleeve to reinvigorate interest among the already "Wii Fit"-ted masses, I don't see Wii sales continuing at their current heights in 2010.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 2:1

2. [PlayStation 3](#) sales will increase year over year in North America.

Sony's powerhouse is already starting to see a sales bounce thanks to a lower, \$299 price point, holiday releases like *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* and an effective new ad campaign. This trend should continue well into 2010, when anticipated exclusives like "God of War III," "Gran Turismo 5," "MAG," "Heavy Rain" and "The Last Guardian" start rolling in. As more and more people jump on the HDTV bandwagon through the year, I expect Sony's built-in Blu-ray player will make it look like an increasingly compelling all-in-one home entertainment choice to many consumers as well. Whether the increase will be enough to make the PS3 more competitive with the Xbox 360 and Wii is an open question, but the system seems poised to finally show sales improvement of some kind in the coming year.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 2:1

3. Rhythm-game sales will decline year over year.

Activision CEO Bobby Kotick might say the rhythm-game market isn't saturated, but the slashed sales projections for "DJ Hero" tell a different story. Despite healthy sales for "The Beatles: Rock Band" and "Guitar Hero 5" this holiday season, the genre feels like it's struggling for the next big idea that will really drive consumers to open up their wallets for

that new, must-have instrument-shaped peripheral. There's a chance that new idea could come about sometime next year, but it seems more likely the genre will start to stagnate under slowly growing disinterest in the same old karaoke, guitar- and drumming-based games. That said, I expect the market for downloadable songs for existing "Rock Band" and "Guitar Hero" platforms will remain strong throughout 2010.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 3:1

4. Industry-wide game sales will go up, year over year.

Everyone knows the recession caused the game industry to hit a bit of a slump this year, so some sort of bounce back along with the slowly recovering economy seems likely. But an industry recovery seems even more obvious when you look at the blockbuster-heavy lineup of releases that have already been announced for the first half of the year. "Mass Effect 2," "God of War III," "Heavy Rain," "BioShock 2," "Alan Wake," "Splinter Cell: Conviction," "Final Fantasy XIII," "Gran Turismo 5" and more all make for a first-half lineup that makes even the impressive first half of 2009 look like amateur hour. And that's all months before the historically strong [holiday season](#), which will likely see more yet-to-be-announced blockbusters. All in all, it's shaping up to be a strong year for gaming.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 5:4

5. At least one download-only release will be on the shortlist for the Game of the Year awards.

The downloadable-games market went a long way to breaking free of its image as retail's neglected cousin this year, with console releases like "Flower," "Shadow Complex" and the "Bit.Trip" series, indie PC games like "Auditorium" and iPhone games like "Zen Bound" garnering

widespread critical acclaim and attention (if not necessarily sales). But the consensus picks for 2009's game of the year are still congealing around big-budget, cinematic retail releases. This may not be the case next year, as developers stretch the bounds of what downloadable games can be and increasingly use downloads as a way to get around the used-game-centric retail market. Maybe "Game of the Year" contention is a little bit lofty, but regardless, I expect the downloadable-game market to continue its march toward relevance in the coming year.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 10:1

6. No PS3 motion control or Natal-exclusive games will be on the shortlist for Game of the Year.

For all the hype surrounding the unveiling of Sony and Microsoft's camera-based motion controller's at this year's E3, I think the technologies are bound to be disappointments when they actually come out. After a burst of interest surrounding their release, I expect both controllers will be inundated with gimmicky, shallow, motion-controlled games (see: the majority of the Wii software lineup), and both will lack the killer apps needed to really drive widespread adoption. Without that sort of critical mass, most developers and publishers will only grudgingly support the devices, adding half-hearted camera-control support to games that also have more traditional controls, which critics and consumers will continue to largely prefer. By the end of the year, the hype will have given way to reality and Sony and Microsoft will slowly scale back their focus on these new controllers, preparing instead to integrate better motion controls into their next consoles.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 5:4

7. The PSP Go will drop in price during the first half of the year.

Depending on who you listen to, the initial sales numbers for the PSP Go have either been "in line with expectations" (according to Sony) or merited "strong reservations" about the PSP's chances in the U.S. (according to a Gamasutra analysis). Either way, the redesign has apparently not become the runaway success Sony needed to turn around its portable system's also-ran image. The Go's main problem seems to be the competition, not from Nintendo's DS, but from Sony's own PSP-3000, which offers more functionality, albeit in a clunkier form factor, for a lower price. As PSP Go inventories start to clog Sony's warehouses, expect it to attempt to clear out the excess by pushing the Go's price to be more in line with the original PSP.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 4:1

8. At least one new major console or portable system will be announced.

We've already heard hints that the follow-up to the Nintendo DS is in development, and Microsoft has said the next Xbox will launch in 2011 or 2012. This puts both systems on track for some sort of vague official announcement at one of the 2010 trade shows, with an initial hands-on demonstration some months later. I wouldn't count out the possibility of Sony announcing a true follow-up to the PSP, either, especially if the system's sales don't pick up fast (see the PSP Go prediction, above). Expect Nintendo and especially Sony to be a little slower to announce their follow-up consoles, the former because the [Wii](#) is still going strong and the latter because [Sony](#) has loudly insisted that the PS3 is meant to be on the market for 10 years.

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 3:1

9. Nintendo will announce a portable Virtual Console of Game Boy classics for the DSi.

OK, this one is a bit of wishful thinking on my part. If Nintendo was going to do something like this, it probably would have announced it alongside the DSi Shop and prepared it for the launch of the system. Still, I'm willing to risk being wrong on this one, on the off chance that someone at Nintendo will see this article and say, "Hey, that's a good idea. Let's do it!" Please?

OFFERED ODDS AGAINST: 25:1

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