Nintendo to launch 3-D version of handheld console

March 23 2010, By TOMOKO A. HOSAKA , Associated Press Writer

Shigeru Miyamoto, Japanese video game designer and producer is seen during an interview with Associated Press in London, Friday, March 19, 2010. Miyamoto, the creator of such classic games as "Mario" and the man behind Nintendo's popular Wii console, was in Britain to receive a fellowship at the GAME British Academy Video Games Award. Miyamoto says he's devoting most of his energy to turning Nintendo Co.'s DS handheld consoles into tour guides and educational aids. (AP Photo / Kirsty Wigglesworth)

(AP) -- Looking for its next big hit, Nintendo said Tuesday it would begin selling a 3-D version of its popular handheld console within a year.

The "Nintendo 3DS" will feature a 3-D display without the need for glasses. The new portable gaming device will be compatible with software made for earlier DS models, the company said.

Nintendo revealed little else in its brief statement, except to say that it would offer details in June at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles.

But the Kyoto-based company's announcement immediately lit up tech blogs and Twitter feeds as it offered a clue to mounting questions about its future. What will Nintendo do next? How will it stay ahead of rivals?

Like other consumer electronics makers, Nintendo is turning to 3-D as part of its answer. The company is also looking to expand on the DS's long-running success.

Although the Wii is losing market share, demand for the DS remains solid more than five years after it was launched. Sales for the handheld are gradually slowing, but the Nintendo DS topped U.S. game hardware sales in February with 613,200 units moved, beating Microsoft's Xbox 360, the Wii and Sony's PlayStation3, according to market researcher NPD Group.

The DS logged global sales of more than 125 million units since its late-2004 launch through December, Nintendo said.

Last week, a senior Nintendo video game designer told The Associated Press during a trip to London that his company plans to turn the DS into educational aids and teaching tools.

Shigeru Miyamoto, the man behind Super Mario Bros. and other popular video games, said Nintendo will being rolling out the DS system in Japanese junior high and elementary schools in April. He framed the project as part of his company's effort to broaden the audience for gaming consoles.

Tuesday's announcement comes just days before Nintendo releases the

latest version of the device, the DSi XL, in North America.

Retailing for $190, the XL will have two screens like its predecessors. But as the name suggests, the device and screens will be much larger than the currently available versions. The XL is already available in Japan.

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Citation: Nintendo to launch 3-D version of handheld console (2010, March 23) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2010-03-nintendo-d-version-handheld-console.html

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