

Gaming giants bet on 3D for next big boost

August 18 2010, by Francois Becker



A man plays a game on the Sony PlayStation 3 game pad during a presentation by electronics giant Sony on August 17, in Cologne, Germany. At the start of Gamescom, Europe's biggest trade fair for interactive games and entertainment in the western German city of Cologne, market leaders were trotting out new creations with images that appear to leap off the screen.

The global gaming industry is jumping on Hollywood's 3D bandwagon but the bet is risky as consumers appear reluctant to shell out for the necessary screens and glasses, insiders said Wednesday.

At the start of Gamescom, Europe's biggest trade fair for interactive games and entertainment in the western German city of Cologne, market leaders were trotting out new creations with images that appear to leap off the screen.

Driving a racing car on a three-dimensional track while parked on the sofa or playing tennis and seeing the ball spin in the air in front of you in your living room -- Japanese behemoth Sony was showing off how it is transforming the gaming experience.

"We already have a leading market share in [3D TV](#)," said Kazuo Hirai, CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, referring to a small but growing segment of the multi-billion-dollar market.

"Still the number of units has to increase a lot. In order for that to happen, we need to have exciting software, [broadcast TV](#) in 3D, motion pictures available in 3D -- on blue ray, and also video games."

Consumer electronics makers are aiming to ride a wave of interest in 3D technology thanks to recent movies such as the sci-fi blockbuster "Avatar".

Sony expected 10 percent of the TVs it sells this year will be 3D-compatible and is working on technology that does not require glasses.

Industry experts say a wide array of game titles is crucial to convincing consumers to invest around 1,500 euros (1,935 dollars) in a compatible screen and a pair of [3D glasses](#).

Hirai said games were easier to develop than movies in 3D because everything is computer-generated in the first place.

But a 3D game costs about 20 percent more to produce than a standard one, said Olivier Wolff, senior vice president of Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment's international games division, a unit of the Hollywood studio.

He said Warner had also placed 3D at the "heart of its strategy" but

acknowledged that the market would need another two to three years to take off.

Wolff said that by then, one household in 10 in major markets would have a 3D television and that one in five of Warner's games would be in 3D.

The priority is to develop racing and combat games as they offer the most intense immersive viewing experience, Wolff said, promising new 3D games for the "Lord of the Rings" and "Mortal Kombat" series.

"With the 3D, we put more attention into the things that are between the player and the camera," said Ed Boon, developer of "Mortal Kombat," a wildly popular urban street fighting series.

"You don't want plants in the foreground that will obstruct the gameplay, it's just a question of balance. Because you have to see the game."

Matt Southern, director of development on the 3D "Motorstorm 3" game for Sony, said that game designers were wise not to go overboard with the new technology or risk alienating players, not to mention giving them headaches.

"We have to be very, very careful to test the game and be sure that the 3D is functioning well in terms of gameplay and for the visuals," he said.

"You have to find a balance between what you can imagine and what would be comfortable and enjoyable."

Many experts think consumers are unlikely to rush to buy the premium-priced 3D TVs due to the need for special glasses and because many people have already upgraded to high-definition sets in recent years.

Japanese gaming giant Nintendo has opted to develop its own technology and is building a new machine, the 3DS, capable of producing 3D images on a small screen that does not require glasses.

US competitor Microsoft is less enamoured with the possibilities of 3D and is looking at family-friendly alternatives.

"The equipment is not there yet and we see the glasses as a brake on the development of 3D," said Benoit Fouillet, a Microsoft Xbox product manager.

Gamescom runs until Sunday.

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Citation: Gaming giants bet on 3D for next big boost (2010, August 18) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-08-gaming-giants-3d-big-boost.html>

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