

Tokyo event showcases fledgling 3-D gaming

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A visitor tries out his favorite game at Capcom's booth during the Tokyo Game Show in Makuhari, near Tokyo, Thursday, Sept. 16, 2010. (AP Photo/Junji Kurokawa)

(AP) -- The Tokyo Game Show has a lot of people wearing dark glasses this year, with the buzz turning 3-D at the annual event that brings together the latest offerings from game-machine and software makers.

But despite the fanfare and razzle-dazzle footage, people checking out 3-D games for the PlayStation 3 at [Sony](#) Corp.'s sprawling booth were warned to take the special glasses off immediately, should they feel sick or giddy.

And Nintendo Co., also hoping for a boost from 3-D technology with its planned 3DS handheld that's set to go on sale before April, was conspicuously absent.

The event previewed to reporters and guests Thursday ahead of its opening to the public this weekend. It is expected to draw more than 180,000 people.

Kyoto-based Nintendo, the manufacturer of the Wii console and Super Mario games, is skipping the show and planning a separate Sept. 29 event, also at Makuhari Messe hall in this Tokyo suburb, where the 3DS is expected to take centerstage.

"It's like the elephant in the room," said gaming expert Mark MacDonald, executive director at Tokyo-based 8-4 Ltd., which brings Japanese games to the U.S.

MacDonald said visitors like him were watching for what he called "peripherals" for machines already on sale such as the Move motion-controller from Sony and Kinect from Microsoft Corp., billed as controller-free because it detects a player's movements.

The show's focus was obviously on 3-D but the full potential of 3-D for games has yet to be explored, he told The Associated Press.

"It's a young technology in terms of games. People don't know yet how much is too much," MacDonald said. "You might start feeling sick, or you just want to see the game and feel I can't see what's going on."

Tokyo-based Sony announced that its PlayStation 3 game console will work as a Blu-ray disc player for 3-D movies and music videos, not just 3-D games, with a software update download starting Sept. 21.

The free-of-charge update for movies and other content had been promised for later this year. But the date was moved up to ride on the momentum of 3-D popularity, Sony executive Hiroshi Kawano said.

"The appeal and impact of games will be definitely enhanced with 3-D technology," he said during a two-hour presentation at the Sony booth. "The industry has gained a new engine for growth in 3-D."

Kawano said the portion of 3-D TVs will likely move up from 5 percent of all TV sets sold this year to 20 percent next year. Sony aims to sell 2.5 million 3-D TVs next year, he said.

The [PlayStation 3](#) already plays 3-D games with an upgrade that could be done over the Internet earlier this year.

Some of the 3-D games shown at the event, such as a clip of the planned "Metal Gear Solid," were as impressive as 3-D movies in providing visceral computer graphics and illusion of depth. But others, such as 3-D versions of racing games, looked disappointingly similar to their 2-D predecessors.

The reason more time is needed for 3-D gaming to take off for home consoles is that it requires a 3-D TV set, which cost about \$2,000 or more. [Software makers](#) are waiting for sales of the TVs to increase before investing in developing 3-D games, says Yusuke Tsunoda, analyst at Tokai Tokyo Securities Co. in Tokyo.

"It still remains to be seen whether 3-D gaming is going to provide a genuinely new experience," he said. "But it is a big opportunity like a gift that's dropped from the sky."

Among other news at the game show was Sony's Move motion-controller, going on sale Sept. 19 in the U.S. and Oct. 21 in Japan.

A 5,980 yen (\$70) "starter kit" for the Move comes with software called "Beat Sketch!" which allows people to make computer-graphic paintings on the TV screen using the motion-controller stick.

A similar kit for the U.S., with a different game, costs \$99.99, and the wand by itself costs \$49.99, underpricing Microsoft's Kinect at \$150 in the U.S. and 14,800 yen in Japan.

Move and Kinect are both answers to the enormously successful [Wii](#) wand-controller from Nintendo.

Separately, Phil Spencer, head of Microsoft's games division, announced five new partnerships with Japanese studios and declared the country's creativity as key to its Xbox 360 console's future.

He said Microsoft, based in Redmond, Washington, plans to help Japanese [game](#) makers - recently seen as insular and lagging overseas competitors - to aggressively pursue a bigger share of the global market.

"Japanese games are the games that the world loves to play," Spencer said in a keynote speech.

Jay Defibaugh, analyst with MF Global FXA Securities, believes 3-D gaming is the perfect way for Sony to differentiate itself from [Microsoft](#), which does not offer 3-D, as well as from Samsung Electronics Co. of South Korea, which makes 3-D TVs but doesn't have movies or games businesses.

Pushing 3-D gaming may, in the long run, boost Sony's movies and music businesses, as well as its TV and Blu-ray recorder operations, he said.

"Obviously, Sony as a whole looks at 3-D very strategically," Defibaugh said.

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