

Microsoft Kinect: Revolutionary technology in early phases

December 2 2010, By Victor Godinez

Nintendo got the motion-activated gaming craze started with the Wii controller, and Sony improved on the motion controller with its Move.

But Microsoft is taking the controller out of the picture altogether with its new [Kinect](#) accessory for the [Xbox 360](#).

There are some minor frustrations and issues that need to be ironed out, but Kinect is an awesome technology that has a ton of potential for the future and is a lot of fun right now.

Unlike the Nintendo [Wii](#) remote or Sony Move, Kinect doesn't require any physical game controller at all.

Your entire body is scanned and digitized in real time by the camera in the Kinect sensor, and your on-screen character can mimic whatever movements you make.

It's really almost like magic. When my 6-year-old son saw me controlling a game by just waving my hand, he immediately insisted that he too wanted to use "the Force."

But there are some caveats.

First, you really need a decent-size living room. Microsoft recommends at least six feet between you and your Kinect - eight to 12 feet is better. Be prepared to move your couch.

If you're too close to the sensor, it can't detect your body. And if you want to play a multiplayer game, you need enough room that you don't end up clubbing your partner with your elbow.

Second, while it is undeniably cool to be able to navigate through menus by waving your arm, actually selecting menu items is a tedious affair. You have to hold your hand cursor over the desired option for several seconds before it activates.

Presumably this is to minimize accidentally selecting an option just by casually waving your hand across it, but it would make more sense to let you select a button by quickly closing your hand into a fist. As it's set up now, using a regular controller is much faster.

That said, the voice navigation is excellent, and even with a dishwasher running in the background, Kinect flawlessly picked out my voice and responded to commands.

Being able to open and close the disc tray by verbal command, or navigate to an NBA basketball game being streamed live online through ESPN3, is quick and snappy and it actually feels as though you're living a tiny piece of the Jetsons lifestyle we've been anticipating.

In games, motion tracking was generally excellent in several launch titles I tried.

None of the games is exceptional, although the bundled Kinect Adventures is fun and shows off the technical capabilities well, such as in white-water rafting.

But when both my kids started play-testing the software, they often got so excited that they drifted out of the camera's field of view or got too close to the screen and couldn't figure out why their avatar had either

disappeared or started flailing and contorting like a meth-addicted zombie.

Still, that didn't stop them from laughing their heads off the entire time they played, and that reaction says a lot about Kinect's value.

At \$150, Kinect is a very expensive peripheral, and right now, there are few titles worth buying for hard core gamers.

But Microsoft has some stunning technology in here, and if it can streamline the menu controls and if game developers can figure out how to make Kinect a complement to, rather than a replacement for, a traditional controller, hard core gamers will give it a chance as well.

For example, imagine playing a shooting game with a regular controller, but when you come to the edge of a wall, you peek around the corner by just leaning your body to the side. It's a motion so natural that almost everyone instinctively does it when gaming.

Now that instinct can actually be translated onto the screen. That's amazing.

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