

Sony to release new PlayStation Portable this year

January 27 2011, By YURI KAGEYAMA , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Sony said Thursday the successor to its PlayStation Portable machine will go on sale late this year, offering the quality of a home console in an on-the-go machine boasting a screen double the size of smart phones.

The NGP, short for "next generation portable," has a touch panel in the front and touch pads in the back to allow players to tap on the machine to move images, in addition to the usual buttons and switches.

It also offers a third-generation wireless connection plus the already available WiFi, allowing for more social networking and downloads. Its five-inch screen is OLED - a different technology from liquid-crystal display - for good color and image quality about four times better than the current PSP.

[Sony](#) said gamers will be able to play games they had been playing on the PlayStation 3 home console without feeling any drop in quality.

Kazuo Hirai, who heads Sony Corp.'s gaming section, proudly held the shiny black machine to cameras, declaring: "This is the NGP."

He did not give a price, regional release plans or other details.

"We will pursue the ultimate in entertainment," said Hirai, President and Chief Executive of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc., Tokyo-based Sony's gaming unit. "We want to create a revolution in your hands."

His comments underline an effort at the Japanese electronics and entertainment company to ward off the formidable threat of Apple Inc. which is delivering hit after hit such as the [iPhone](#) and iPad.

The popularity of smart phones such as the iPhone is a potential threat to [game machine](#) makers as more people play games, as well as watch video, do e-mail and chat on cell phones. People are also using other portable devices such as the iPod and iPad to play games.

Hirai said Sony was working on what he called PlayStation Suite, for enjoying some [PlayStation Portable](#) games on smart phones and tablet PCs. Sony will start providing support and starting a licensing program for devices running Google's [Android](#) software systems starting this year, he said.

There had been some speculation about Sony introducing phone features, or the so-called PlayStation Phone. Hirai did not talk about that in his presentation.

Sony is facing off in portables against Japanese rival Nintendo Co., which is introducing a new DS with glasses-free 3-D features next month.

U.S. software maker Microsoft Corp. is another major player with its Xbox 360 home console, but it does not make a portable. Microsoft has a cell phone business with its Windows Phone 7 software for games and other entertainment on smart phones.

PlayStation Portable sales have been dropping - by as much as 37 percent last year to about 2.7 million for April-September from 4.3 million the same period the previous year.

By contrast, Apple sold 16.2 million iPhones during the October-

December quarter alone.

Sony has not yet disclosed its PSP sales numbers for October-December.

More than 64 million PlayStation Portable machines have been sold cumulatively around the world since it went on sale in December 2004.

Yuji Fujimori, an analyst with Barclays Capital in Tokyo, says it's too early to assess what Sony has in the works.

In the long run, game consoles may disappear altogether as games and [social networking](#) have arrived on [smart phones](#) and other devices, he said.

"Sony's message is more about keeping rival Nintendo in check," said Fujimori.

The NGP comes packed with Sony's latest motion sensor and GPS location technology so that gamers can tilt and sway the machine to play golf games, kill monsters and experience other "virtual realities," Hirai said.

Hirai brought on stage several game software developers such as Sega and Capcom who showed footage of [PlayStation 3](#) games adapted for NGP to demonstrate great graphics quality. Sony has signed dozens of developers around the world to work on NGP games.

"We believe NGP will change the way people play games on the go," said Philip Earl of U.S. game maker Activision Inc.

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