

Nintendo to launch 3-D console in Japan

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Visitors examine Nintendo's portable videogame console with a 3D display called the "Nintendo 3DS" at a conference in Chiba, suburban Tokyo in 2010. Japanese entertainment giant Nintendo will on Saturday launch in its domestic market the world's first video game console with a 3-D screen that works without special glasses.

Japanese entertainment giant Nintendo will on Saturday launch in its domestic market the world's first video game console with a 3-D screen that works without special glasses.

The maker of the iconic "Super Mario Bros" games hopes the hotly anticipated 3-D version of its [blockbuster](#) DS handheld gadget will restore its fortunes after a disappointing recent run in the competitive gaming industry.

The debut of the 3DS comes as Nintendo faces fresh challenges from

rivals such as Sony as well as smartphones and tablet computers, including Apple's [iPhone](#) and [iPad](#), that have taken a chunk out of the gaming market.

"For the next five years or so, Nintendo fully expects the 3DS to act as a key pillar underlying its overall business performance," said Jay Defibaugh, director of equity research in consumer electronics and games for MF Global FXA Securities.

"Whether 3DS ends up being a one-trick pony or gimmick will be determined by whether Nintendo and its third-party partners can deliver innovative new approaches to gameplay."

The dual-screen 3DS, priced at 25,000 yen (\$305) will test the appetite of Nintendo's core fans and the wider market for 3D gaming, after rivals catering to what is seen as a more "serious" gaming market launched their own updates.

The new-generation DS machine will be released in Europe and the United States in March.

Ahead of its launch the new model ran into controversy after the company warned that children up to six should not use the gadget in 3-D mode because it could have an adverse effect on eyesight development.

Nintendo's 3DS is entering a fast-evolving and highly competitive area of gaming technology.

Sony last year launched its PlayStation Move system, which enables users wearing special glasses to play 3-D games using wand-shaped controllers.

And in January it unveiled its latest portable touchscreen gaming console

codenamed "Next Generation Portable" to succeed its PlayStation Portable device, boasting 3G mobile connectivity and WiFi.

Microsoft's motion-sensing Kinect system for the Xbox 360 system, which lets players use body gestures and does not require hand-held controllers, hit the market last year.

"Nintendo's competitors used to be just Sony and Microsoft, but the company now face challenges from Samsung, Apple and providers of social-networking games," said Yusuke Tsunoda, analyst at the Tokai Tokyo Research Centre.

For its latest device, "the target should be children... I believe it is difficult to make adults add the 3DS to the items that are already in their handbags at a time when more and more people use smartphones."

Nintendo's latest machine allows the illusion of depth to be increased or decreased so that games can be played in both 2D and 3D, while built-in cameras let users take 3D pictures.

Like many smartphones it also includes an accelerometer-based motion detector, while it can connect to existing Wi-Fi networks to download additional content and exchange data with other nearby 3DS units.

Around 30 software titles will be available between launch and June, Nintendo said.

The company reportedly will ship about 1.5 million units to Japan in the first month after the debut in an effort to avoid the huge shortages seen with the launch of earlier versions.

In 2006 demand for the new DS Lite overwhelmed the company's ability to buy materials and electronics parts.

For months fans around the world could not find stores that had the consoles, while Internet auction sites offered the gadgets at inflated prices.

The launch of the 3DS comes at a challenging time for [Nintendo](#).

The company saw its group net profit plunge nearly 75 percent for the nine months ended December, hit by a huge foreign exchange loss and a continued sales slump in the absence of new products.

With the sales of machines such as the DS and hugely popular Wii easing in a saturated market, the February launch of the 3DS means the games giant did not see the kind of end-of-year sales lift usually brought by a new console.

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