

Sony Ericsson unveils first PlayStation smartphone

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The latest edition of Sony Ericsson's Android software-based Xperia smartphones, the Xperia Play, has the expected equipment including 5-megapixel camera and four-inch (10.2-centimetre) multi-touch screen.

The big difference is a slide-out gaming pad with a digital pad, analogue touch pads, shoulder buttons and the familiar PlayStation icons -- a circle, cross, square and triangle.

"I am delighted to see Xperia Play as the first PlayStation certified device," said Kazuo Hirai, president of Sony Corp.'s networked products and services group.

The phone is powered by the latest Android platform, Gingerbread, the group said after it was shown off for the first time Sunday at the mobile phone industry's annual congress here in Barcelona.

Sony Ericsson said it had got together with major gaming publishers to deliver titles via the Android Marketplace, including Need for Speed, Sims 3 and the first multi-player version of the FIFA game for mobile.

GLU Mobile/Activision were to deliver Guitar Hero and Gameloft titles including Assassin's Creed and Splinter Cell.

Sony Ericsson said it was linking up with Unity Technologies to provide a flow of 3D game titles.

Since the new smartphone is the first to be certified for PlayStation, it will also have access to PlayStation game content directly through a PlayStation suite to be launched this year.

The new phone puts Sony's PlayStation gaming repertoire in the mobile arena to compete directly with Microsoft, which already makes Xbox games available on its Windows 7 mobile software.

Windows 7 got a major leg-up last week when Nokia announced it had scrapped its own software to adopt Microsoft's mobile operating system.

Microsoft is hoping its alliance with Nokia will catapult Windows Phone 7 back to the forefront of the smartphone market while Nokia is hoping to beat off rivals such as Apple and Google.

Sony Ericsson's Xperia Play is to go on sale in April. In the United States, it will be launched on the Verizon Wireless network.

Games will be downloadable via Android Marketplace for 5-10 euros, said Sony France managing director Pierre Perron.

It is likely to go for about 600 euros (\$800) if sold without the subsidies that come when phones are provided with a mobile operator's contract, Perron said.

The PlayStation is one of the big money-earners at Sony, which has been hit by the strength of the yen and sliding prices for flat-screen LCD televisions.

Sony this month reported an 8.6-percent drop in net profit to 72.3 billion yen (\$893 million) in the three months ended December.

But the Networked Products and Services division responsible for PlayStation games and Vaio computers reported operating profit more than doubled.

The company last month unveiled a new portable touchscreen gaming console as it looks to launch a fresh challenge to Nintendo and Apple in the hugely competitive mobile gaming market.

The device, codenamed "Next Generation Portable," will succeed Sony's PlayStation Portable handheld device and boasts 3G mobile connectivity and WiFi, allowing users to download games and other content.

It is due to hit stores before the end of the year, Sony said.

The company is also making its catalogue of PlayStation games available for download on phones running Google's Android operating system.

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