

# While consoles slug it out, mobiles games zip in

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The big three game console makers brought their latest kick-ass wares to the industry's annual get-together this week, but some question their future amid an explosion of super-nimble mobile gaming.

Nintendo provided the first glimpse of a second-generation [Wii](#), Microsoft added a string of tricks to its hot-selling [Xbox 360](#), while Sony introduced its "PlayStation Vita" at the [Electronic Entertainment Expo \(E3\)](#) in Los Angeles.

But while the spotlight was on blockbuster hardware and software offering shoot-em-up and slug-it-out games like "Battlefield" and "Mortal Kombat," some analysts say the "console wars" could one day be seen as a passing sideshow.

Whether on smart-phones, [tablet computers](#) or online on laptops and desktop PCs, gaming that does not involve paying hundreds of dollars for a dedicated console and up to 60 dollars for premium games is gathering pace.

"The growth of mobile gaming has been meteoric," Scott Steinberg, head of consulting firm Tech Savvy Global, told AFP at the sprawling three-day Los Angeles event, which wrapped up Thursday.

"There are thousands of games proliferating on a variety of devices, many of which players can enjoy and access for free... it's presenting probably the greatest threat the traditional [video games industry](#) has ever

faced," he said.

[Social gaming](#) -- multi-player games played online, typically using avatars -- has been around for a number of years, but what is new is their growing sophistication, and the sheer numbers of people flocking to play them.

Add to that ever-accelerating Internet speeds, and the dizzyingly expanding array of [mobile gadgets](#) on which games can be played, and you have a trend to worry the boardrooms of Nintendo, Microsoft and Sony.

In a hotel suite away from the main show this week, some of the new twists in the gaming world were on display.

They included a version of mass-selling FIFA soccer [game](#), but using an iPad as a table-top pitch and iPhones as hand-held controllers, or Apple's market-leading tablet also used in horizontal mode as a board to play Monopoly.

Steve Stamstad of Electronic Arts Interactive, one of the main new-platform game makers, said the growth of mobile gaming was not a threat to the console-based giants.

"We don't see it cannibalizing the market in any way," he told AFP, as a group of 20-something game developers played enthusiastically on their new creations.

"These are basically additive... We don't look to have games that you play on an [iPad](#) or an [iPhone](#) take the place of a PS3 or whatever, the experiences are wholly different," he said.

New platform gamers tend to play for shorter times, but more

frequently, he said, while noting research that more female players use gaming websites -- perhaps not unsurprisingly, for skeptics about violent console games.

Zynga, the company behind the mega-hit "Farmville" game on Facebook, is preparing for an Initial Public Offering (IPO) later this month on the basis of its runaway success.

Developers may only charge cents or a few dollars for their wares -- or give them away for free, making money with ads or selling virtual merchandise -- but with the huge number of players, the income stacks up.

"Zynga is going to be an IPO to look out for," Kushal Saha of Cascadia Capital told Investor's Business Daily, adding: "I would be shocked... if we didn't have three or four gaming IPOs between now and this time next year."

Steinberg said the move towards mobile and online gaming is as significant a development as the arrival of the main consoles themselves, which ended the era of gaming arcades in the 1980s.

"It's ushering in a second golden age for gaming," he said, noting that social gaming is expected to grow from a \$1 billion industry now to a \$5 billion in 2015 -- behind the traditional industry's \$20 billion, but gaining.

For all the buzz around mobile and online gaming in Los Angeles this week, no-one is predicting the demise of consoles any time soon.

"It's not going to happen in the short term. There's still a massive reliance on physical goods and retail product, its not going to suddenly be abandoned," said Steinberg.

Susan Panico, senior director of Sony's PlayStation Network (PSN), saw the mobile gaming trend as complementing videogame consoles that offer more cinematic and sophisticated experiences and link to the Internet "cloud."

"Certainly every form of entertainment competes for people's time," she told AFP at E3. "What's great about smartphones or tablets is they are gateways into gaming when people want more immersive, deeper experiences."

Philip Asher of games developer Trendy Entertainment said: "I don't think consoles are going to disappear, just evolve. Their function will be media, not purely games, and their input may be completely different."

"That said, I believe mobile games are completely changing the industry and directly competing with console games," he said, adding that games will have to evolve so they can cross between platforms.

"Many of these platforms will be able to play with each other; so, you can start your [game](#) on your console, continue it on the bus in your phone, and play it later in the office on your PC.

"Gaming will become more about content and less about the platform that content is on."

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