

Sony unveils next-gen portable device 'Vita'

June 7 2011, By RYAN NAKASHIMA , AP Business Writer



Kazuo Hirai, bottom, President and Chief Executive of Sony Computer Entertainment America, introduces the company's next generation portable gaming machine, PlayStation Vita, during a news conference at the E3 Gaming Convention in Los Angeles, Monday, June 6, 2011. (AP Photo/Chris Pizzello)

Sony Corp. on Monday took the wraps off its next generation portable gaming machine, PlayStation Vita, a touch-interface and motion-sensitive handheld that outdoes its workhorse PlayStation Portable and will go on sale before the winter holidays. Company executives have called the device Sony's biggest product launch since the PlayStation 3 five years ago.

The device will allow gamers to be connected with one another over cellphone networks and Wi-Fi hotspots, and use GPS location-tracking technology. In the U.S., Sony is partnering exclusively with AT&T Inc. for cellphone service.

The device, available for \$249 for its Wi-Fi-only version, was unveiled at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry's annual convention known as E3. A version that will also have cellphone service will retail for \$299, and buyers will have to subscribe to a cellular data plan.

The handheld has front and back cameras, a touchscreen in front, a touch pad on the back and two knob-like joysticks. It will enable gamers to play against people using [PlayStation 3](#) consoles over the Internet-based [PlayStation](#) Network, a system that was recently restored after being shut down due to a massive hacking attack.

Sony apologized again for the outage and said since the network was restored, activity is back to 90 percent of the pre-attack level.

The hardware comes with an accelerometer, which means it will also react to being held at different angles and being moved through the air.

"PlayStation Vita will revolutionize the portable entertainment experience," Kazuo Hirai, group chief executive officer of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc., told a crowd of 6,000 at the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena. "The whole world is really in play."

The Vita is slightly bigger than the [PlayStation Portable](#), which has sold more than 70 million units worldwide since its launch in 2004. The PSP will continue to be sold along with new games.

But the Vita - code-named "NGP," or next generation portable, until Monday - will enable gamers to do more.

A Sony staffer demonstrated a version of "Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception," in which he used the familiar buttons and knobs but also touched the screen to move the Drake avatar across ledges and attack

opponents in close combat.

Another game called "Reality Fighters" will allow users to take a picture and have fighting characters battle each other using objects from the real world.

Along with social games and email, Sony also unveiled a communication service it called "Party" that will enable voice and text chat during games or when using the Web browser.

Users will also be able to sense when other gamers are nearby, what games they have played recently, and enable in-game gifting of virtual items.

Sony was the latest technology company to make a big bet on connected-everywhere services, following Apple Inc.'s presentation Monday in San Francisco of its iCloud storage service, which will allow consumers to access their photos, music and documents on distant servers.

"Cloud is where everything is headed," said Ricardo Torres, editor-in-chief of GameSpot.com. "This is certainly the attempt by Sony to make sure they're not left behind."

Sony also introduced a range of new 3-D games such as "Resistance 3," a traditional shooter game, in a big push to make it a leader in the format. It is bundling the PS3 game with a pair of 3-D glasses and a 24-inch 3-D monitor for \$499, a price far lower than most 3-D displays on the market.

Sony's array of new 3-D games and the Vita itself are directed at so-called core gamers, who are focused on serious action and effects.

But in a reflection of the growing popularity of games that make use of

iPad and iPhone touch screens and Apple's iOS operating system, like the addictive "Angry Birds," [Sony](#) also said Monday it would put PlayStation games onto smartphones that run on Google Inc.'s competing Android operating system.

It called the service focused on such casual gamers "PlayStation Suite" and said further details would be announced in the coming months.

"Smartphones and tablets have really created a large market for casual gaming," Hirai said in an interview after Sony's presentation. "We want to make sure we're in both areas."

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Citation: Sony unveils next-gen portable device 'Vita' (2011, June 7) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-sony-unveils-next-gen-portable-device.html>

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