

Ubisoft plays to guitar fantasies with 'Rocksmith'

October 9 2011, by Glenn Chapman



Jose Zurita, an employee of Ubisoft, plays the Rocksmith video game at a demonstration event in San Francisco, California. The game allows players to use any guitar to play. The game is slated for release on October 18.

Laurent Detoc beamed as he pictured the the flood of guitarists that Ubisoft will unleash on the world after its innovative Rocksmith videogame hits the market this month.

For the first time, people will be able to plug real guitars into videogame consoles, pretend to be rock stars and actually walk away knowing how to play the instruments.

"We've had at least 100 people try this [game](#) and we have yet to find one person who says it doesn't work," Detoc, [Ubisoft](#) executive director for North America, said while giving AFP an early look at Rocksmith.

"People will get a lifelong skill if they stick with this game," he continued. "It is very validating to think how many new guitarists Ubisoft will create."

Detoc is passionate about the potential for [videogames](#) to improve lives instead of simply serving as diversions.

Ubisoft titles include a "Your Shape" fitness game as well as a hit "Just Dance" line, the latest of which was just released.

Rocksmith is the first major title created by the French videogame titan's studio in San Francisco.

The idea for a guitar videogame with real-world payoff took root when Detoc and members of his team were chatting about successful [Guitar Hero](#) titles that used guitar-shaped plastic controllers barely in tune with real instruments.

"How many parents are there out there with teenagers who spent 100 hours playing 'Guitar Hero' or 'Rock Band' but didn't learning anything?" rhetorically asked Detoc, a dad with young children learning piano.

"How much waste," he continued. "Wouldn't you rather play the real thing instead?"

Ubisoft bought a startup specializing in technology that converts sound from analogue to digital formats and set to work on Rocksmith.

Versions of the videogame tailored for [Xbox 360](#) and [PlayStation 3](#) consoles will be released on October 18.

"It's awesome; I've played it a lot," Detoc said excitedly.

"I was an acoustic guitar player, but I wasn't that good," he continued.
"You learn with a fraction of the pain."



Participants of the Rocksmith video game demonstration event in San Francisco, California, use their guitars to play the game. The game allows players to use any guitar they wish.

Players will need real guitars, electric or acoustic models with pickups into which quarter-inch jacks can be plugged.

A cable to connect guitars to [videogame consoles](#) comes with Rocksmith software, which will be priced at \$79. A Rocksmith package that includes a Les Paul Jr. guitar with the game and cable will be sold for \$200.

"A plastic guitar you will throw away at some point," Detoc said, downplaying the added cost to the game. "A real guitar you are going to keep."

The game turns consoles into guitar amplifiers complete with software "pedals" to imbue notes with sound effects like real rock guitar players

do.

Sound can be routed to home stereo speakers, letting players crank volumes as desired.

Rocksmith displays an animated on-screen "note highway" that shows the fret board of a guitar neck on its side. Notes slide toward players, who only need to hit the corresponding strings at the designated moments.

Game scores depend on how well players follow along. A key aspect of the game is "dynamic difficulty" technology that lets the software gauge how well a player is doing and then adjusts the challenge accordingly.

"We have as many difficulty levels as necessary to make sure we can provide the notes in a spoon-fed way," Ubisoft senior producer Nao Higo said while AFP had a try at the game.

"The game is constantly adapting to you," he continued. "You are always challenged without being overwhelmed."

Players' guitar skills improve along with their game scores.

"This hasn't been done before," said Rocksmith creative director Paul Cross.

"There have been pieces of plastic with strings stuck on top, but there has never been a game where you plug in a real guitar," he continued.

Rewards for high scores include unlocking "pedals" and even getting to improvise notes without being penalized.

"When you get really good, you go to a master mode with no notes on

the screen; you have to go from memory," Cross said.

Rocksmith features mini-games such as shooting animated ducks by hitting the right notes at the right moments. Each mini-game is a fun way to hone guitar skills such as chords, slides, and bends.

"When you break it down as the game does, plucking a string is pretty damn easy," Cross said. "It is like Whac-A-Mole, you just stick your finger in the right place at the right time."

A split-screen mode lets two people play Rocksmith together, and microphones can be plugged in for someone to sing along without being scored on performance.

The Rocksmith team is a mix of musicians and engineers who have worked on blockbuster action or sports videogames.

"Here is a great way to learn to play music that fits with our modern lifestyles," Cross said, strapping on a [guitar](#) and plugging into Rocksmith. "We knew we could get people to play, we just didn't know it would work so well."

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