

# Sony gears up for PlayStation Vita's Japan launch

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In this Sept. 15, 2011 file photo, visitors crowd at the booth of Sony Computer Entertainment for a new portable machine, PlayStation Vita, at the Tokyo Game Show in Chiba, east of Tokyo. Sony's long-awaited PlayStation Vita portable game machine hits stores in Japan on Saturday Dec. 17 with the company predicting brisk sales even though the launch has missed much of the holiday shopping season. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara, File)

Sony's long-awaited PlayStation Vita portable game machine hits stores in Japan on Saturday, with the company predicting brisk sales even though the launch has missed much of the holiday shopping season.

Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. President Andrew House told reporters Thursday that pre-launch orders had exceeded the allocation made for those keenest to get their hands on the device "extremely quickly" in Japan. He declined to reveal numbers.

The PS Vita goes on sale in North America and Europe on Feb. 22.

Enthusiasm for the new machine among gamers could lead to some shortages at first, House said. But he said Sony can handle the expected load.

"I'm pretty confident ... that there will not be major challenges in meeting demand, even though there may be short-term," House said.

For the Tokyo-based electronics and entertainment giant, the Vita is the biggest product launch since the PlayStation 3 console five years ago.

A successful debut would help Sony offset the rest of its struggling business. It projects a loss of more than \$1 billion for the fiscal year through March 2012. That would be its fourth straight annual loss.

The next-generation device is a touch-interface and motion-sensitive handheld that Sony hopes will be a strong successor to the [PlayStation Portable](#). Gamers can connect over cellphone networks and Wi-Fi hotspots, and use GPS location-tracking technology.

The Vita 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 each other using [PlayStation 3](#) consoles over the Internet-based PlayStation Network, a system that was hit with a massive hacking attack earlier this year.

House touted the Vita's advantages over rival Nintendo Co.'s 3DS, which had a disappointing start despite the company's efforts to market its 3-D technology. Critics complained about a lack of interesting games.

Nintendo ended up slashing prices on the 3DS after less than six months.

In contrast, two dozen software titles will accompany the Vita's

introduction - the largest number of launch titles in PlayStation history, House said. Games include "Uncharted: Golden Abyss," "LittleBigPlanet," and "Wipeout 2048."

House also questioned whether 3-D actually makes gaming better.

"If you see people out on the blogs saying, 'I turned it off,' then it's not then really acting as a great game enhancer."

The Vita's Wi-Fi only model will cost \$249.99 in the U.S. and euros 249.99 in Europe. The Wi-Fi and 3G-enabled Vita will retail for \$299.99 and euros 299.99.

Game prices in Japan will range from 2,940 yen (\$37.67) to 6,090 yen (\$78).

Although the 3DS costs about 40 percent less than the Vita in Japan, House contends that the Sony device offers a "truly unique gaming experience" that will lure hardcore gamers as well as new gamers.

Both Sony and Nintendo are being challenged by the rise of smartphones and tablets, through which casual gamers can play inexpensive and simple games like the mega-hit "Angry Birds."

House, however, said people will pay if it's worth it.

"Clearly, if the experience merits it, I don't think price is necessarily the barrier to entry," he said, citing the \$1 billion in sales racked up by the latest "Call of Duty" game by Activision Blizzard in just over two weeks. "The point is being able to give people a sense of value for money."

House, a U.K. national, took over as president and CEO of [Sony Computer Entertainment](#) in September. He has worked at Sony Corp. for

more than two decades.

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