

Wii U, sequels take another swing at E3

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In this June 8, 2011 photo, Nintendo's video game console:Wii U is demonstrated at the Nintendo booth at the 2011 Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles. At this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Nintendo is expected to show off exactly what kinds of games will be available for its new touchpad-powered Wii U console, while other gamemakers will hype the latest installments in their "Call of Duty," "Halo" and "God of War" franchises. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, file)

(AP) — Is the Wii U right for you?

At last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), Nintendo captured most of the spotlight by unveiling the Wii's successor, a high-definition console called the [Wii U](#) that utilizes a tablet-like touchscreen controller. Attention alone wasn't enough to declare a victory. Folks weren't, well, feeling it. Critical reaction was mixed, and the Japanese gaming giant's stock dropped.

"Nintendo has an uphill battle this year," said Morgan Webb, co-host of the G4 gaming show "X-Play." "It's really a branding problem. I think a lot of people are still confused about the Wii U. They're going to have a hard time convincing people that this could be a better gaming experience than the iPad."

At this year's E3 convention in Los Angeles next week, Nintendo Co. will attempt to assuage such concerns by introducing gamers to titles that will be available for Wii U when it's expected to launch later this year. Previously, the "Mario Bros." creator only teased what was capable through a series of technology demonstrations.

E3 comes at a time when the gaming industry could use a few good parties and pep talks. The NPD Group, a research firm that tracks the U.S. sales of [game](#) software, hardware and accessories, said that while consumers spent more than \$1 billion on games and accompanying gizmos in April, retail sales fell 32 percent from a year ago, the fifth month of decline.

The continued interest in cheaper-to-produce mobile, social and downloadable games is expected to be showcased more than ever before at E3, a flashy extravaganza typically focused on building buzz for the loudest and sexiest games. Zynga, the developer of social games like "FarmVille" and "Words With Friends," will have a presence at E3 for the first time.

"Every time I go to E3, I'm usually surprised," said Jay Wilson, lead designer of the role-playing game "Diablo III." "I expect to be surprised again. What I hope is that no matter what platform people are working on, no matter what new area that they're exploring, the most important thing is gameplay. If a game provides great gameplay, the platform doesn't really matter."

Indeed, a strong line-up of games will be integral to the future success of the Wii U, a lesson Nintendo learned the hard way after last year's lackluster launch of the 3DS, its glasses-free 3-D handheld device. "X-Play's" Webb thinks Nintendo could win over the E3 crowd if it introduces innovative, unexpected, must-own games that appeal equally to both hardcore and casual gamers.



In this video game image released by Microsoft/343 Industries, a scene is shown from "Halo 4." At this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Nintendo is expected to show off exactly what kinds of games will be available for its new touchpad-powered Wii U console, while other gamemakers will hype the latest installments in their "Call of Duty," "Halo" and "God of War" franchises. (AP Photo/Microsoft/343 Industries)

Unless Nintendo's fellow first-party publishers Sony Corp. or Microsoft Corp. unveil new hardware or radical updates to their respective PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 consoles, the E3 spotlight — for better or worse — will undoubtedly be shining back in Nintendo's direction. (Microsoft and Sony have previously shot down rumors they'd unleash new consoles at this year's E3.)

"The Wii U was announced last year, and that stimulates all kinds of thoughts about what's possible," said Mark Lamia, the studio head at

"Call of Duty: Black Ops II" developer Treyarch. "It'll be interesting to see what happens with the first parties. It's always an exciting time when rumors are in the air, and we see if E3 is the time when they become more than rumors."

Most other game makers will use the expo to hype new entries in their seemingly never-ending franchises. There's Activision's "Call of Duty: Black Ops II," Microsoft's "Halo 4" and "Forza Horizon," Sony's "God of War: Ascension" and "LittleBigPlanet Karting," Ubisoft's "Far Cry 3" and "Assassin's Creed III," as well as the revealing of several other new chapters.

Some sequels at E3 are emerging from deep within the vault. Franchises once considered extinct, such as invasion simulator "X-COM," stealthy shooter "Hitman" and town builder "SimCity," will return to a vastly different landscape. Will these once beloved series be re-embraced? It's a strategy that's worked for some ("Twisted Metal") but failed others ("Syndicate").

Electronic Arts Inc. will show off such games as the real-world military simulator "Medal of Honor: Warfighter," a new iteration of its "Need for Speed" racing series and the sci-fi horror sequel "Dead Space 3." EA, like many publishers, will also be talking technology, focusing on advancements with its Frostbite graphics engine, digital distribution and cloud computing

"Cloud competing isn't rocket science," said Patrick Soderlund, executive vice president at the EA Games label. "It is a great feature that we're embracing as a game company. It's just a natural evolution that I think will be used in most of our products, to some extent."

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