

Activision brings online 'Call of Duty' to China

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(AP) — Activision is bringing its popular "Call of Duty" series to China as a free online game.

Activision Blizzard Inc. said Tuesday that it will publish the game through a partnership with Tencent Holdings Ltd., a Chinese online game company. There is no release date yet, and the contents of the game must still be approved by the Chinese government, as is the case with all games released in the country.

The game is being developed in Shanghai specifically for the Chinese market. Players will be able to customize their weapons and characters by purchasing virtual items in the game.

Though "Call of Duty" is played on game consoles in Western countries, in China people play games online, in Internet cafes. Consoles like the PlayStation and the Xbox are almost non-existent there.

"The only way to be successful here is to be local," said Activision CEO Bobby Kotick. Activision had set up the Shanghai studio to develop the game two years ago. Kotick said China is "underappreciated as an inspired, creative source of ideas" for games.

Though it is working with Activision to operate "Call of Duty" in China, Tencent has a competitor in the country called CrossFire. It's a military shooter played online for free, with extra weapons and other items available for purchase.

"Call of Duty" won't be Activision's first venture into China. It already runs the online games "World of Warcraft" and "StarCraft" in the country.

Shares of Santa Monica, California-based Activision climbed 52 cents, or 4.3 percent, to \$12.46 in afternoon trading. The stock has traded in the 52-week range of \$10.40 to \$14.40.

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