

# Nintendo's TVii a replacement for the remote (Update)

December 19 2012, by Ryan Nakashima

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This undated photo released by Nintendo shows its new controller for the new Wii U console. Nintendo is switching on its TVii service in the U.S. and Canada on Thursday, Dec. 20, 2012. The new platform transforms the tablet-like controller of the new Wii U console into a remote that changes the channel on your TV. (AP Photo/Nintendo)

Nintendo is switching on a television service that transforms the tablet-like controller for its new Wii U game console into a remote that changes the channel on your TV and puts programs from the Internet just a few finger taps away.

The TVii service will debut in the U.S. and Canada on Thursday, the company said. That's a delay from previous plans to have the service available when the game console went on sale in North America on Nov. 18. The TVii service launched in Japan on Dec. 8.

The aim of TVii is to bring order to the hundreds of channels on regular TV and the thousands of shows and movies available through apps from Netflix Inc., Amazon.com Inc., Hulu Plus and Google Inc.'s YouTube.

It's the first time a video game console maker has integrated live TV controls in a device and could be the extra incentive needed for on-the-fence shoppers ahead of the Christmas holiday.

Nintendo Co.'s Wii U console has a unique controller—the GamePad—which is covered with joysticks and buttons and boasts a front-facing camera and 6.2-inch (15.5-centimeter) touch screen. The GamePad also houses an infrared emitter that talks directly to your TV or set-top box.

TVii scans what's available and offers you the option of watching a show, sports event or movie on live TV or through apps that connect to the Internet. By the end of March, Nintendo says that it will integrate TVii with TiVo so that it will be possible to program a TiVo digital video recorder through the game console as well.

"This is a way to get every member of the household to pick up the GamePad hopefully every day," said Reggie Fils-Aime, president of Nintendo of America. "Hopefully this leads to a significant change in how consumers view and interact with their TV."

For years, home entertainment enthusiasts have had to grapple with a bunch of different controllers to work their televisions, set-top boxes, DVRs, disc players and game consoles. TVii has the potential to dispense

with some of that hassle.

If you search for "The Walking Dead," for example, TVii will show you the next time it's on AMC and give you the option of buying previous episodes from Amazon or watching them on Netflix. If it's on now, you can change the channel from the GamePad. Users will be able to watch only channels they already get via antenna or through their TV provider, but search results will include all the options available, which could entice some people to upgrade their channel packages. Netflix and Hulu Plus require separate subscriptions that cost \$8 a month each. TVii itself is free.

TVii also has a traditional channel guide and will recommend shows you might like based on favorite shows, networks and movies that you enter. Different users can have different profiles, and parental controls are included.

Nintendo hopes the service boosts sales of its console. About 425,000 Wii U units were sold in the first seven days on sale. That's faster than the rollout of Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 and Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3 when they debuted in November 2005 and November 2006 respectively, although initial sales are often constrained by supply, not demand.

Analyst Michael Pachter of Wedbush Securities said the TVii service puts Nintendo a step ahead of its competitors, but he expects Microsoft to close the gap next year with a next-generation Xbox that includes a TV tuner. Microsoft hasn't announced such a device.

"It gives them a head start. I think they should be congratulated on making this a truly multimedia device," Pachter said. "I don't think that advantage is going to last very long."

Nintendo has also added social networking features to its service. A team of curators will watch the top 100 shows on live TV and post details and a screenshot of important events, such as "a great shot in a basketball game or an unexpected twist in 'Mad Men,'" according to Zach Fountain, director of network business for Nintendo of America.

Users can then comment on these moments and have those posts show up on Nintendo's Miiiverse network, as well as Facebook and Twitter if they choose. Users that express emotions could wind up with a sad or happy-looking Mii avatar.

Live sporting events such as pro or college football will also be accompanied by scores and play-by-play summaries on the GamePad's screen.

One problem with the service could be the GamePad's battery life. Nintendo says the controller can be used three to five hours depending on activity and screen brightness before it needs to be charged. But TV ratings agency The Nielsen Co. says the average American watches nearly five hours of TV per day. Heavy users may need to keep the controller plugged in to a wall socket, or buy a \$25 battery pack that its maker, Nyko, promises will double the battery life.

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Citation: Nintendo's TVii a replacement for the remote (Update) (2012, December 19) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-12-nintendo-tvii-remote.html>

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