

# Review: Nintendo's TVii tops button-laden remotes

January 2 2013, by Ryan Nakashima

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This undated product image released by Nintendo of America shows a Nintendo Wii U GamePad running Nintendo TVii. The service, which comes with the new Wii U game console and its innovative GamePad touchscreen controller, transforms the GamePad by turning it into a simple remote control that operates your TV and set-top box. (AP Photo/Nintendo of America)

Nintendo's TV-watching tool for the new Wii U game console beats my regular remote control hands down. Called TVii, the service transforms how you watch television in three key ways. It turns the touch-screen GamePad controller for the Wii U into a remote control for your TV and set-top box. It groups your favorite shows and sports teams together,

whether it's on live TV or an Internet video service such as Hulu Plus. And it offers water-cooler moments you can chat about on social media.

It takes some getting used to, and I had a lot of re-learning to do after years of using my thumb to channel surf. But once I did, I found the service an advance from the mass of buttons on most TV remote controls.

TVii comes free with the [Wii U](#), although it didn't become available in the U.S. until mid-December, about a month after the [game machine](#)'s debut.

One nice touch is that TVii gives you a way to search for shows over Internet video apps and live TV all in one place. I can then choose whether to watch it on the big TV or on my controller's [touch screen](#), which measures 6.2 inches (15.7 centimeters) diagonally.

Handling these different sources of video at once is a tall order, and Nintendo Co. does it pretty well. No one else has combined live and [Web TV](#) as seamlessly before. As the lines blur between the two, I would hope some of TVii's advances are copied and improved upon by other [gadget makers](#) and [TV signal](#) providers.

For starters, TVii asks for your [TV maker](#), your set-top box maker, your location and your TV provider (that could be an antenna). TVii then uses infrared codes to control your TV just like the old remote, and it can offer a traditional channel guide for live TV shows. TVii also asks for your favorite shows, [sports teams](#) and movies. This helps it create an easy-to-understand grouping of shows you might want to watch.

I appreciate the way TVii walked me through the setup process. It was refreshing, given the misfortune I recently had of trying to program the [remote control](#) that came with my cable set-top box, which is about as

fun as doing your tax returns. TVii takes away the need to read folded-up instruction manuals that appear to be written by and for electronics hobbyists.

After the setup, TVii presents you with a series of icons for Favorites, TV, Movies, Sports and Search. A little avatar of your identity is in one corner, and tapping on it lets you adjust your favorites or go through the setup again. Each person in a household can have a different avatar and set of favorites.

In Favorites, your shows are listed with cover art, and you can swipe through the offerings. Tapping one, say, "The Mindy Project," will pull up an episode list with pictures and brief summaries. Choosing an episode will bring up a range of options—the channel if it's on live TV, or buttons for Hulu Plus or Amazon, where you can pay for monthly access or just one episode through the service's app. (The free version of Hulu is blocked on gadgets, including the Wii U and tablet computers. Apple's iTunes, unsurprisingly, isn't integrated.) The option of clicking through to Netflix will be added some time in 2013.

One hiccup is that if you want to watch a show on live TV now, it asks if your TV's input source is already set to the set-top box, rather than the Wii U or another gadget such as a DVD player. If it is, you tap "yes" and the channel changes. If not, you have to tap until the source switches to the right one and then tap "yes." Still, there's no need to go back to your TV's remote control.

The other menu items for TV, Movies, Sports and Search operate pretty similarly. Eventually you'll get a range of options to watch. In the case of sports, you'll likely see several game possibilities, with the latest score showing up on each game icon.

As an alternative, you can resort to a physical TV button on the

GamePad that brings up touch controls that mimic a simplified, standard remote.

Another option is using an altogether separate interface in which favorite channels and other controls are displayed graphically on a semi-circular wheel. It looks strange, and I wouldn't recommend it.

Anyone who is frustrated by the jumble of cables and boxes that now surround TVs will see TVii's appeal. My wife said she liked the ease of holding and touching the controller, rather than fiddling with the button-laden remote. One downside I can see with TVii is that you have to keep looking down to figure out what to watch. And you have to plug it in frequently, as the GamePad controller will die out after three to five hours of use.

TVii also offers a standard channel guide in which you can scroll up and down for programs on different channels or right and left for different times of day. A touch will change the channel to the program, which is nice.

For certain shows and sporting events, TVii will supply a running list of key events called "TV tags." These descriptions of events, like the precise moment when Mindy's Christmas party descends into chaos, are displayed on the GamePad's screen, along with a screenshot. Tapping on one opens up a comment window, and an onscreen keyboard allows you to make a comment. For sports, you get a description of each play, such as the number of yards thrown in a pass, beside a graphic that gets updated.

Not many people have Wii U consoles yet, nor is everyone tuned to TVii. As a result, I found myself with only one or two commenters to share my thoughts with.

If you've connected TVii to Facebook and Twitter (again, some sign-up is involved), your comments will go out to your friends and followers, but the TV tag that you are commenting on won't show up, so they might not know what you're talking about. TVii adds the hashtag "NintendoTVii" to help readers take a guess.

In the end, TVii isn't perfect.

It isn't yet able to program your digital video recorder, although it will do so for TiVo DVRs by March. Sports are limited to pro and college basketball and football, and there's no integration with fantasy sports leagues. And the battery life of the GamePad is short.

A review unit I was sent failed to take a charge and had to be replaced, although I haven't found others who have had the same problem.

These irritations aside, Nintendo has given us a way to control the clutter of channels, apps and devices crowding around the TV. It's relatively easy and intuitive and some updates are on the way. Considering the garble of the TV universe, that's pretty good.

## **About TVii:**

TVii turns the GamePad controller for the Wii U into a remote control that integrates your [live TV](#) and Internet video experience. The service is free, but you'll need a Wii U game console, which starts at \$300. You'll also need to pay extra to use video services such as Hulu Plus, Amazon and Netflix.

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