

Next-gen consoles battle for new gamers

June 9 2013, by Glenn Chapman



Gaming fans play Playstation 3's Hitman Absolution on the third day of the E3 videogame extravaganza in Los Angeles on June 7, 2012 in California. Sony and Microsoft will be battling for the spotlight at the E3 videogame show with new consoles designed to put them at the heart of home entertainment.

Sony and Microsoft will be battling for the spotlight at the E3 videogame show with new consoles designed to put them at the heart of home entertainment.

Both companies are expected to showcase [blockbuster](#) titles for high-

powered machines that go beyond rich, immersive [game play](#) to expanded capabilities for socializing online and accessing films, music, sports, or [television shows](#).

"There is certainly going to be a massive spotlight on the two next-gen consoles," Bethesda videogame studio marketing vice president Pete Hines said ahead of the E3 expo that gets its unofficial start on Monday in Los Angeles.

"Certainly, games are going to look better, but not so dramatic in terms of differences," he continued. "A lot of stuff is in the margins with changes you can't wrap your head around easily."

Sony unveiled a new generation PlayStation 4 ([PS4](#)) system in February and laid out its vision for the "future of gaming" in a world rich with [mobile gadgets](#) and play streamed from the [Internet cloud](#).

At a press event in New York, computer entertainment unit chief Andrew House said PS4 "represents a significant shift from thinking of PlayStation as a box or console to thinking of the PlayStation 4 as a leading place for play."

There was no glimpse of a PS4 at the launch event, setting the stage for its hands-on debut at E3.

Those attending the industry-only gathering will also be able to try the new-generation Xbox One that Microsoft introduced last month and touted as an entertainment hub that goes far beyond games.

The beefed-up hardware is powered by software that allows for instant switching between games, television, and [Internet browsing](#). Microsoft-owned Skype was also integrated for online group video calls.

Kinect motion and sound sensing accessories accompanying the consoles recognize users, respond instantly to commands spoken in natural language and even detect a person's pulse.

"This is the beginning of a new generation of games and entertainment and a new generation of smart TV," Microsoft entertainment unit executive Yusuf Mehdi said during the unveiling at the company's headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

While next-generation consoles, including the Wii U released by Nintendo late last year, will dominate E3, digital play has changed considerably from when their predecessors arrived some seven years ago.

Smartphones and tablet computers have powered a boom in games available for free, with money made from ads or in-game purchases.

"I think the console players will continue to be in denial about what is really going on," said Clive Downie, who spent 17 years at videogame titan Electronic Arts before becoming chief at mobile games platform company DeNA.

"People's time is being eroded, so console sales will be eroded by people playing on mobile devices."

TechSavvy Global analyst Scott Steinberg predicted a year of blockbuster titles at E3 as rival console makers showcase big-name sequels or bold new franchises, aimed at inspiring people to buy new machines.

Hotly anticipated titles include "The Last of Us" by Naughty Dog studio and a new installment of "Grand Theft Auto" by Rockstar Games.

Given the ease with which game software can be made available as downloads or played in the Internet "cloud," there should be intriguing independent titles as well, according to the analyst.

Makers of games for smartphones, tablets, or online play at social networks will be at E3 to make connections but face the challenge of competing with cinematic console game trailers shown on screens fit for Times Square.

"You are going to see a big push to re-ignite interest in traditional gaming systems because the world of gaming has fractured in so many directions," Steinberg said.

"Consoles have become one flavor of gaming," he continued. "That was wonderful when you had three flavors but how do you keep players who have had a taste of the rainbow?"

Lifestyles have shifted from the time when players had a couple of hours to immerse themselves in console games, and people are increasingly squeezing play into sessions of five minutes or less sprinkled through the day, Downie said.

"People aren't changing their lifestyle to buy a console and sit around and play for hours at a time," Downie said.

"If anything, time is being eroded by more things outside of gaming in the world we live in now."

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Citation: Next-gen consoles battle for new gamers (2013, June 9) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-next-gen-consoles-gamers.html>

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