

Disney prepares a toy offensive with 'Infinity'

August 12 2013, by Derrik J. Lang



This undated publicity photo released by the Walt Disney Company shows the video game, "Disney Infinity: The Toy Box." With cartoony posters plastering the walls and action figures standing at attention on nearly every flat surface, a once mundane conference room at Walt Disney Interactive Studios has been transformed into the war room for "Disney Infinity," the company's ambitious project that combines real-life figurines with a virtual world. As colorful date-stamped orders and dozens of 4-inch-tall soldiers lined up across the room suggest, Disney is readying for a years-long siege, not just a one-time battle, for consumers' attention. (AP Photo/Walt Disney Company)

With cartoony posters plastering the walls and toy figures standing at

attention on nearly every flat surface, a once ordinary conference room on Disney's Glendale campus has been transformed into the colorful war room for "Disney Infinity," the ambitious project from the company's interactive division that combines real-life toy figures with virtual worlds.

"This is like being in my bedroom," says "Infinity" executive producer John Vignocchi while bouncing around the space, gleefully showing off concept art, prototypes and a mock-up of a store display. "This is really the most comfortable place where you could talk to me. It's where every massive fight and every major decision concerning 'Infinity' has gone down."

It's fitting the space has been dubbed the "Infinity" war room because the Walt Disney Co. is readying for a yearslong siege—not just a one-time battle—for consumers' attention with the multi-platform franchise. At its fan-centric D23 Expo on Sunday, Disney unveiled a second wave of characters coming to "Infinity" this fall and winter after it debuts Aug. 18.

"Infinity" utilizes real-life toy figures to depict Disney personalities in sprawling virtual locales where those same characters can do stuff like race vehicles, create and play games and construct buildings—cooperatively or alone—as well as go on specific adventures in their own realms. Each toy stores and transmits the character's history through an "Infinity" reader.

The new additions include Sorcerer Mickey from "Fantasia"; Woody, Jessie and Buzz Lightyear from "Toy Story"; Wreck-It Ralph and Vanellope from "Wreck-It Ralph"; Phineas and Agent P from "Phineas and Ferb"; Jack Skellington from "The Nightmare Before Christmas"; Rapunzel from "Tangled"; and Anna and Elsa from "Frozen," a new Disney film set for release Nov. 27.

The second infantry joins such previously announced characters as Jack Sparrow, Hector Barbossa and Davy Jones from "Pirates of the Caribbean"; Mike and Sulley from "Monsters University"; Lightning McQueen, Mater and Holley Shiftwell from "Cars"; Mr. Incredible, Violet and Dash from "The Incredibles"; and Lone Ranger and Tonto from "The Lone Ranger."



This publicity image released by Disney shows characters from the video game, "Disney Infinity." With cartoony posters plastering the walls and action figures standing at attention on nearly every flat surface, a once mundane conference room at Walt Disney Interactive Studios has been transformed into the war room for "Disney Infinity," the company's ambitious project that combines real-life figurines with a virtual world. (AP Photo/Copyright Disney)

"In the beginning, when we picked our first set of characters, it was more about going around and saying why we wanted those characters to the various groups around the company," Vignocchi said. "As time went on and the creators began to see what we were doing with 'Infinity,' the

roles kind of changed a bit, and they started approaching us with excitement."

The game—or platform, as Disney likes to call it—will be available for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii and Wii U, as well as accessible through Nintendo 3DS and PC, and on tablets and smartphones. The toys work seamlessly between consoles, meaning a Mrs. Incredible figure can go from a PS3 in your living room to the Wii in your friend's basement with her superpowers intact.

It's not the first of its kind. "Infinity" closely resembles the successful "Skylanders" franchise from Activision Blizzard Inc. However, Disney's rendition of the toy-meet-console genre relies on better-known characters and adds an open-world toy box mode akin to "LittleBigPlanet," where users' imaginations can run wild, for example, plopping Jack Sparrow in Cinderella's coach.

If audiences pull the trigger on "Infinity," it could become another huge moneymaker for Disney. A starter pack, which includes the game, reader, three characters, three playsets and a power disc that bolsters abilities or adds new items to the toy box, will be \$74.99 with additional figurines and discs sold separately or bundled together, like in the villains and princess packs.

Disney is betting "Infinity" will be a hit. Disney Interactive Studios, which has been responsible for such games as the Mickey Mouse console adventure "Epic Mickey" and the online virtual world "Club Penguin," is the company's least successful division. In recent years, it's moved away from console games in favor of more popular and cheaper to produce mobile games.

"It doesn't mean the console can't be popular and successful from a bottom line, but it's definitely a different world," Bob Iger, the

company's chairman and CEO, told the Fox Business Network ahead of the D23 Expo at the Anaheim Convention Center on Friday. "We've had our, call it, fits and starts in this business, and we think we are due for a hit. We believe 'Infinity' is that hit."

More information: infinity.disney.com

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