

# Five cool things at E3: This year it's software

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In front of the Los Angeles Convention Center this week, there's a mutant strapped to the front of a bus, signaling the beginning of the sensory barrage that is the Electronic Entertainment Expo.

Each summer E3 takes over L.A. as one of the largest gaming events in the world. The bus stationed out front is promoting an upcoming game that mashes together zombies and skateboards - two popular gaming genres that hitherto had not been combined.

The title, "Sunset Overdrive," was just one of dozens of in-progress software titles brought to the event for feedback from gamers. The people in attendance, after all, are among those who game designers hope will one day fork over as much as \$60 to play for a few weeks or months.

In 2013, new game consoles were shipped from Sony and Microsoft to compete with Nintendo's struggling Wii U, but this year there was no new hardware news of note from any of the big players. Instead, the industry's giants focused on promises of software that could make their systems more appealing.

Here's a look at five of the coolest ways the gaming industry is attempting to reach more gamers.

## 1. Can "build your own Mario" save Nintendo?

Generations of gamers have guided Mario on his ageless mission from

left to right. Soon they'll be able to create Mario's world, too.

Next year Nintendo hopes to use its Wii U system, which includes a tablet-like controller, to let gamers create their own levels for Mario to traverse. With "Mario Maker," players use the tablet controller to place blocks, tubes and red and green-shelled baddies on a level.

Creators can choose which style of 2-D Mario game they want to make - the original 1980s version, where if you fell down a pit you lose one life, or the easier version from the 2000s that gave players a way of jumping out of that predicament.

The title is among a growing list of games, like "Minecraft," that are focused on making players part-time [game designers](#). Nintendo needs to come up with something; it recently reported a \$457 million loss for its most recent year, partly due to woeful sales of the Wii U.

## 2. Game flinging gathers steam at Sony.

Sony is attempting to put video games on more screens in the home through its long-brewing PlayStation Now service. Think Netflix streaming for games.

Launching as a beta at the end of July on the \$400 PlayStation 4, the new service should bring well-loved games from the previous generation PlayStation 3 to the new system without the need to buy any discs.

The service should complement a newly announced \$100 PlayStation TV box coming later this year. The box sits next to a TV, like Apple TV or Roku, to stream games from PlayStation Now or a PS4 located in another room.

## 3. Afraid of flying? This might be for you.

Oculus VR showed off a handful of games made with the upcoming \$350 Rift development kit. The kit, called DK2, is a huge upgrade over the original virtual-reality goggles that shipped last year. Now there are more pixels flashing in front of a person's eyes to convince them they are somewhere else. And there's a camera to track more head movement, solving many of the issues with the original gear that made some people feel sick.

One of the games shown at E3 is "Eve: Valkyrie," which puts the wearer of the VR goggles in the pilot's chair of a versatile one-man spaceship. When you sit down in a real chair and put these goggles on, you can turn your whole body around in your virtual chair to look behind you.

What you see isn't a booth at a trade show but the rear of a spaceship's cabin. Suddenly you're shot out into space and dog-fighting with others, looking every direction through the glass windshield of your ship for the next bogey.

#### 4. Where are my hands?

There's one big limitation to that "Valkyrie" VR demo. Only your head is transported to the other world. You hold onto a controller in the real world to control the ship but you can't see your hands, arms or body movements in the virtual world.

What if you could? That's what Control VR promises. A short walk from the "Valkyrie" demo, guys from Los Angeles-based Control VR were accepting people from Oculus into their booth and giving them virtual hands.

The company is raising money on Kickstarter and has achieved its goal of \$250,000 with more than three weeks of fundraising left. For a \$350 donation, they promise to ship a kit that straps to the chest, arms and

hands to put more than a person's head inside a virtual world.

## 5. Spider-Man joins Disney's gaming universe.

Spider-Man recently swung into theaters in a sequel from Sony, but that doesn't mean Spidey can't swing into a video game made by Hollywood rival Disney.

The complicated nature of character rights from Marvel's comic book universe means Sony can keep churning out Spider-Man movies but Disney gets to use the namesake character in its "Disney Infinity" video game.

So Disney fans will be able to catch Spidey joining up with Avengers such as Thor, Iron Man and Hulk when "Disney Infinity 2.0" is released this year.

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