

Japan launch of Microsoft Xbox One a damp squib

September 4 2014



A customer holds a box containing Microsoft video game console Xbox One, at a household appliance shop in Tokyo, on September 4, 2014

The Japanese launch of Microsoft's Xbox One fell flat on Thursday, with journalists covering the debut far outnumbering buyers.

Japan finally got the console more than nine months after it hit shelves in North America, Europe and Australasia and half a year after domestic heavyweight Sony unleashed its PlayStation 4 to grand acclaim.

But the usual enthusiastic crowds that greet big launches in Japan were absent on Thursday morning, with just one buyer at a major electronic retailer in Tokyo.

"I was surprised that I was the first one to get this even though I didn't wait in a queue," said Kazuyuki Wakai, surrounded by half a dozen journalists from Japanese and international media.

Wakai, 30, said he had opted for the Xbox because of its graphics and because of certain titles that are only available on the console, including the "Halo" series.

But Wakai, who also has a number of PlayStations and a Nintendo Wii, admitted the Xbox lags far behind its Japanese rivals in terms of popularity.

"It may be because the bad impression of earlier models still lingers," he said, noting hardware designs and initial technical glitches.

Both Xbox One and PlayStation 4 are aimed at hard-core gamers, strategies the companies hope will insulate them from the challenge posed by free or cheap smartphone downloads popular among the casual player.



Microsoft Japan employees demonstrate video game console Xbox One, at a video game cafe in Tokyo, on September 3, 2014, on the eve of its launch in Japan

Microsoft says application software development and linguistic challenges are among the reasons behind the long lag in launching the Xbox One in Japan.

The company said in April it had shipped more than five million of the consoles globally since it launched in November.

Sony said last month global sales of PlayStation 4 had surged past the 10 million mark in less than a year, a record for the Japanese giant.

Xbox has been trailing badly in Japan. Japanese sales of Sony's PlayStation 3 were 824,000 units in 2013, dwarfing the fewer than

20,000 Xbox 360 consoles, the predecessor to Xbox One, according to estimates by leading game magazine Famitsu.

A Microsoft marketing official told AFP the company expects sales will pick up as more titles are released towards the end of the year.

"We have high expectations as this (machine) is loaded with graphics that will surely satisfy game players," he said.

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Citation: Japan launch of Microsoft Xbox One a damp squib (2014, September 4) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-japan-microsoft-xbox-damp-squib.html>

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