

# Tokyo Game Show: On the hunt for the next Minecraft

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Visitors wear Japanese electronics giant Sony's new head mount display (HMD) 'HMZ-T3' to play videogames at the Tokyo Game Show in Chiba, in suburban Tokyo on September 19, 2013

The staggering \$2.5 billion that Microsoft has just shelled out for Minecraft and its quirky graphics will be foremost in developers' minds at the Tokyo Game Show this week, where simple yet immersive games

are expected to figure heavily.

After seeing the tech titan bid to cash in on the 100 million people who spend hours constructing their own Minecraft worlds and share them online, industry figures will be looking for the next big thing at the four-day event.

Asia's largest digital entertainment exhibition, which kicks off on Thursday in the vast hangar-like buildings of Makuhari just outside Tokyo, will have a whole section for gaming with a social side.

It is already big business—games played online or accessed through sites such as Facebook are hot on the heels of traditional consoles and are set, by some estimates, to overtake them in terms of revenue in the not-too-distant future.

"Nowadays most games have some social features included in them, which has led to an increase in the number of end-users," said market research firm Reportlinker.

The research company dates the take-off of [social gaming](#) to the success of Farmville, a simulation game hosted initially by Facebook in 2009 in which users build farms with their friends.

The global video game industry was worth a whopping 6.3 trillion yen (around \$59 billion) in 2013. A full 70 percent of that is through downloads via console, PC or smartphone, according to Japanese game specialists Enterbrain.

"Games have moved from the console package to the data packet," said Enterbrain.



Employees of Swedish company Mojang, the creator of videogames like Minecraft, at work at their offices in Stockholm on November 10, 2012

This trend is set to grow in the future—analysts at technology research company TechNavio forecast that the global social gaming market will grow an average of 18 percent every year until 2018.

## **'Chat with friends'**

In Japan, popular entertainment platforms Gree and DeNa/Mobage owe their success to social gaming, which they developed widely on Japanese flip-phones before smartphones came on the scene.

Online messaging app Line, launched in 2011 as a communication service to rival US-based Skype and WhatsApp, has also branched out into games, whilst Japanese Facebook-precursor Mixi relies on its

socially connected electronic diversions to survive.

Each of these "big four" companies on the Japanese gaming scene boasts from 25 to 40 million users in Japan.

"The defining feature of social gaming in Japan is that it is scattered disparately between several hundred different developers" who contribute to these platforms, explained Serkan Toto, a specialist on the Japanese game market.

Japanese people play social games to "kill time" or "to chat with friends", pastimes that generate profit—mobile social gaming in Japan was worth 360 billion yen (\$3.3 billion) in 2013, according to Cesa, a Japanese association working in the sector.



Visitors play US software giant Microsoft's Xbox One at the Tokyo Game Show

in Chiba, suburban Tokyo on September 19, 2013

This means that social gaming is hot on the heels of the more traditional market of consoles and their physical discs, which was valued at 410 billion yen (\$3.8 billion).

But the dividing line is becoming increasingly blurred.

The success of Sony's latest home console, the PlayStation 4 (PS4), can be attributed to "incredibly immersive gaming experiences along with deep social capabilities and entertainment provided by our network", said Andrew House, president of Sony Computer Entertainment, back in January.

The console has sold 10 million units in under 10 months.

Gamers will be flocking to the four-day Tokyo Game Show to try the latest offerings in long-running sagas created for Sony PS4, the Microsoft Xbox One or the Nintendo Wii U.

Pocket consoles such as the PS Vita or the Nintendo 3DS will also be represented.

Some 220,000 visitors are expected at the exhibition, where more than 400 exhibitors will be displaying their wares.

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