

## Nintendo's Iwata who led through successes, woes dies at 55

July 13 2015, by Yuri Kageyama

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In this July 15, 2008 file photo, Satoru Iwata, President and CEO of Nintendo Co. Ltd., speaks at a news conference where Nintendo unveiled an enhancement for its Wii Remote controller and new games at the E3 Media and Business

Summit in Los Angeles. Nintendo said President Iwata died Saturday, July 11, 2015, of a bile duct tumor in a Kyoto hospital, western Japan. (AP Photo/Ric Francis, File)

Satoru Iwata, who led Japanese video game company Nintendo Co. through years of growth with its Pokemon and Super Mario franchises, has died after a lengthy illness, drawing a flood of emotional tributes from game fans and industry rivals, the company said Monday. He was 55.

It said Iwata died Saturday of a bile duct tumor.

There was a torrent of sorrow online for Iwata as a person dedicated to entertaining others. On Twitter, fans thanked him for childhood memories and for bringing families together. On some Internet sites, an image of the flag in the Super Mario game was flying at half-staff. Nintendo America announced it was suspending social media activity for the day in remembrance of Iwata.

"He didn't just create technology. He created a whole culture," said Nobuyuki Hayashi, a consultant and technology expert. "It wasn't just a consumer product that he had delivered. He brought to people something that's eternal, what people remember from when they were kids. He was special."

Iwata, president from 2002, died at Kyoto University Hospital. He had not been seen recently at game events, such as E3 in Los Angeles, where he was usually a participant.

Iwata led Nintendo's development into a global company, with its hit Wii home console and DS handheld, and also through its recent troubles

caused by the popularity of smartphones.

His replacement was not immediately announced, but the company said star game designer Shigeru Miyamaoto will remain in the leadership team along with Genyo Takeda, who is also in the game development field.

Iwata had been poised to lead Nintendo through another stage after it recently did an about-face and said it will start making games for smartphones, meaning that Super Mario the plumber would soon start arriving on cellphones and tablets.

The falloff in appetite for game machines in the past few years was partly because people are increasingly playing games or doing social media and other activities on smartphones. Nintendo has repeatedly had to lower prices on gadgets to woo buyers. The company returned to profit in the fiscal year ended March 2015 after several years of losses.

Until the recent shift in strategy, company officials including Iwata had repeatedly rejected the idea of developing games for mobile devices, a market that they brushed off for years as irrelevant.



In this Jan. 31, 2013 file photo, Nintendo Co. President Satoru Iwata speaks during a news conference in Tokyo. Nintendo said President Iwata died Saturday, July 11, 2015, of a bile duct tumor in a Kyoto hospital, western Japan. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara, File)

In March, Nintendo announced an alliance with Japanese mobile game company DeNA Co. to develop games for mobile devices.

Nintendo pioneered game machines since the 1980s, developing one of the first machines and the hit Game Boy hand-held device.

Its main rivals in the business are Sony Corp. with its PlayStation machines and Microsoft Corp. with the Xbox One. Both companies have done better in adapting to the era of online and mobile games.

"I am at a loss for words," said Ken Kutaragi, the former head of Sony

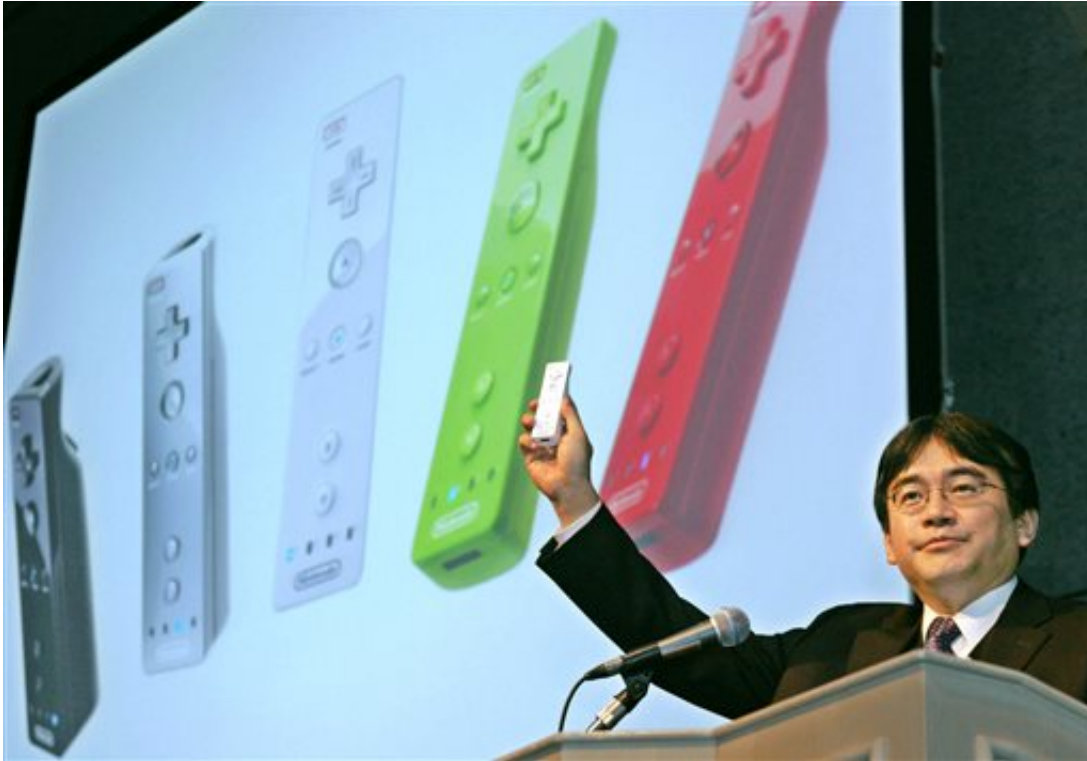
Computer Entertainment. "I pay my respects to the extraordinary leadership of President Iwata, who truly loved games and powerfully showed the way for our industry."

Iwata succeeded Hiroshi Yamauchi, who ruled over the Kyoto-based company for half a century, transforming it from a traditional playing-card company to a technological powerhouse. Yamauchi died in 2013 at 85.

Iwata was picked with Yamauchi's blessing, and Yamauchi remained adviser for many years. Iwata had been employed at an innovative software company before he was recruited as Nintendo chief. He was tapped as president at a surprisingly young age, in his early 40s, for a Japanese company.

Iwata was a respected and popular figure in the game industry, partly because he was relatively more approachable than executives at other Japanese companies, who tend to be aloof and rigid in demeanor.

As news of Iwata's death spread online, condolences and virtual tributes emerged on social media and on Miiverse, Nintendo's online community where users can post notes and drawings created with a Nintendo 3DS or Wii U stylus. Fans were circulating avatars called Mii in the likeness of Iwata, which already existed but were suddenly taking on special meaning.



In this Sept. 16, 2005 file photo, Nintendo Co. Ltd. President Satoru Iwata displays a new smaller remote control device as he makes a key cameo appearance at the annual Tokyo Game Show in Makuhari, east of Tokyo. Nintendo said President Iwata died Saturday, July 11, 2015, of a bile duct tumor in a Kyoto hospital, western Japan. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara, File)

"Halo" and "Destiny" developer Bungie posted a quote from Iwata's 2005 talk at the Game Developers Conference on Twitter: "On my business card, I am a corporate president. In my mind, I am a game developer. But in my heart, I am a gamer."

On Twitter, personal homages were using the hashtags "ThankYouIwata" and "RIPSatoruIwata."

Iwata remained a presence in Nintendo promotional materials up until his death. While he had been absent from the Electronic Entertainment

Expo for the past two years due to his health, Iwata appeared in both human and puppet form in a humorous video presentation streamed June 16 during the gaming expo.

Mark MacDonald, executive director at Tokyo-based 8-4, which consults about games, said Iwata was not afraid to be different and go against mainstream trends in games.

But he was also at one with game players, interacting with them, often using the Internet, in "this playful back and forth, like a David Letterman in your living room," MacDonald said in a telephone interview.

Miyamoto, the Nintendo game designer, said he was shocked and saddened.

"We will upkeep the development approach that we built with Iwata, and we in the development team hope to keep working as one to build toward the future," he said in a statement.

A funeral service will be held on July 17. Iwata is survived by his wife Kayoko. The company declined to disclose other details of his family.

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