

Nintendo providing Mii time with first mobile app (Update)

March 17 2016, by Derrik J. Lang



This image provided by Nintendo shows part of the app called "Miitomo," launching in Japan on Thursday, March 17, 2016, featuring its customizable characters called Miis. The avatars can be created with the app using a

smartphone camera and then outfitted with virtual fashions and quizzed by other Miis. (Nintendo via AP)

For its inaugural lunge into the mobile gaming business, Nintendo isn't relying on bouncy plumber Mario or sword-wielding hero Link. Instead, the Japanese gaming giant is looking to its legions of cutesy avatars.

Nintendo is launching the "Miitomo" app in Japan on Thursday featuring its customizable characters called Miis. The avatars can be created with the app using a smartphone camera and then outfitted with virtual fashions and quizzed by other Miis.

"Miitomo"—"tomo" meaning "friend" in Japanese—is scheduled to come to the U.S. and other markets later this year, but Nintendo has yet to announce a release date.

Reggie Fils-Aime, president of Nintendo of America, believes "Miitomo" is appropriate as Nintendo's first foray into mobile gaming because it's a socially focused experience. It's also less challenging than bringing "Super Mario Bros." or "The Legend of Zelda" to touchscreen-only devices—not that Nintendo has ruled that out.

"You have your smartphone with you and you're engaging with social media on it all the time, so it made sense for us to go down this path with Miis," said Fils-Aime. "Additionally, creating more traditional gameplay experiences with our intellectual property on these devices is going to take time."



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The app represents a big leap for a company known for being fiercely protective of its intellectual properties. Nintendo rarely produces content for other platforms than its own, ranging from the original Nintendo Entertainment System to the Wii U console, which has lagged behind

Sony's PlayStation 4 and Microsoft's Xbox One in sales since its 2012 release.

"Miitomo" is the first of five Nintendo apps that will be released over the next year in a partnership with Japanese mobile gaming company DeNA. It's an opportunity for Nintendo to possibly reach billions of consumers. Despite the jump into mobile gaming, Fils-Aime said Nintendo remains committed to creating dedicated gaming experiences on consoles.

"The smartphone device space allows us to reach many more consumers with our intellectual property and to provide them with new and difference experiences, monetize those experiences and have it be an additive part of our business, not a replacement," said Fils-Aime.

"Miitomo" users can add real-world friends' Miis to the app by finding them through social networking apps. The characters will then ask users questions and spark conversations while using the app.

In a demonstration of an English-language version of the "Miitomo," a Mii character was shown buying a new astronaut helmet to wear and learning that another Mii was a fan of the FX series "The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story."

The app's quirky style is reminiscent of the "Tomodachi Life" series for the hand-held Nintendo 3DS system. "Tomodachi Life," which featured Miis cohabitating on an island, was a top seller in Japan but faced criticism in the U.S. for not allowing same-sex characters to engage in romantic relationships.

"Miitomo" forgoes many of the features of Tomodachi Life" and mostly focuses on festooning avatars. The app is free but users can purchase coins with actual money to buy virtual clothing and accessories. The

currency can also be earned through competing challenges and engaging in Q&A sessions with other characters.

The app will also serve as a launch pad for the My Nintendo rewards program and Nintendo Account, a new multiplatform system that will connect users across Nintendo apps and systems, including Nintendo's next console, codenamed NX.

"We're migrating the current Nintendo Network ID to Nintendo Account," said Fils-Aime. "As we look to the future with NX, Nintendo Account is going to be the way you engage with Nintendo."

More information: www.miitomo.com

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