

## As game makers try new tactics, a turning point for E3

June 10 2016, by Derrik J. Lang

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In this June 13, 2013 file photo, people view the Activision Blizzard Booth during the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles. Electronic Arts and Activision are among the video game publishers angling to cut through the noise on the Electronic Entertainment Expo show floor by ditching their long-standing E3 booths in favor of low-key, fan-focused events. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

What's that in the sky? Is it a sign of E3's future? Or simply another hype-generating monstrosity?

Outside the Los Angeles Convention Center, an imposing 60-foot-tall structure is being erected that may symbolize a shift happening with the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the interactive industry's annual extravaganza expected to draw more than 50,000 invite-only attendees next week.

When completed, the temporary six-story tower sponsored by cheesy snack food brand Doritos will resemble an old-school arcade cabinet. It'll function as both a ginormous working game and a stage for such musical acts as Wiz Khalifa and Steve Aoki. It's one of many fan-centric offerings this year joining E3 Live , the trade show's first-ever spin-off event open to the public.

"It's going to add a festival-like excitement outside the building," said Michael Gallagher, president and CEO of the Entertainment Software Association, which organizes E3. "It's purely a product of this industry now going direct to consumers. If it's a success, I think we're going to learn from this and decide if it's something we'd like to do again in the future."

Over the past 20 years, E3 has typically served as an opportunity for retailers and reporters to convene under one roof for a glimpse at publishers' newest software and hardware. But with the rise of social media and streaming video, publishers' focus has steadily shifted away from the store managers and bloggers in attendance to the gamers following all the action online.

And even as E3 itself evolves, it's also no longer the only date on the calendar for game designers to reveal what they've been working on. In the decades since E3 was born, a growing number of gamer-focused events have sprung up around the world, including the Penny Arcade Expo, BlizzCon and the IndieCade Festival.

"In general, E3 has become a very specific event," said Peter Warman, CEO of interactive industry tracker Newzoo. "It's mostly about blockbuster launches. When you consider mobile, virtual reality, e-sports and Asia, E3 no longer represents the total games business. I'm curious to see how this year's E3 will look and how they address the changing landscape of the industry."

The changing marketplace has prompted several E3 veterans to rethink their approach to this year's trade show. Disney Interactive, Wargaming, Electronic Arts and Activision are among past E3 exhibitors that are either forgoing the three-day expo altogether or opting to host separate events held outside the Los Angeles Convention Center's sprawling show floor.

"Star Wars Battlefront" and "Mass Effect" publisher Electronic Arts is trading its long-standing, ear-splitting booth at the entrance of E3's main hall for its own fan fest across the street near E3 Live. That's where EA will promote such sequels as the robot-filled shoot-'em-up "Titanfall 2" and World War I-set military shooter "Battlefield 1."

Activision, which has occasionally skipped the show floor in years past, similarly decided against showing off the latest editions of "Call of Duty," "Skylanders" and "Destiny" at its own booth. Instead, the publisher will do so at other publishers' outposts, behind closed doors in Convention Center meeting rooms and at its own "Call of Duty XP" event in September.

"It's not a reflection of E3 or its reduced relevance," said Eric Hirschberg, CEO of Activision Publishing. "I know that some other publishers have opted out of E3. We have our own reasons because of our slate this year and how we want to approach our marketing reveals that are specific to us and not specific to E3."



In this June 16, 2015 file photo, attendees play Electronic Arts' "Star Wars Battlefront" at the E3 Electronic Entertainment Expo at Los Angeles Convention Center. Electronic Arts and Activision are among the video game publishers angling to cut through the noise on the Electronic Entertainment Expo show floor by ditching their long-standing E3 booths in favor of low-key, fan-focused events. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

Gallagher of the ESA noted that while many traditional console and PC game publishers have abandon the boisterous show floor, those spaces are being filled by mobile, virtual reality and augmented reality game makers. He said there are now 90 mobile game companies on hand over last year's 70 exhibitors, while VR attendees have swelled from 26 to 53 exhibitors.

Despite the boost in fan outreach, E3 will be business as usual—mostly—for the industry's three largest publishers. Microsoft and

Sony have respectively planned press conferences Monday at the University of Southern California's Galen Center and the Shrine Auditorium, as well as booths showcasing titles like "Gears of War 4" and "Horizon Zero Dawn."

Nintendo, which stopped hosting an onstage press conference at E3 three years ago and instead streams an online video briefing, will again return to the show floor. However, the "Super Mario" publisher will be dedicating most of its floor space to a sole game: a "Legend of Zelda" adventure for its Wii U console and a yet-to-be-revealed new system.

"E3 absolutely remains a relevant event," said Reggie Fils-Aime, president of Nintendo of America. "We were the first to recognize a few years ago that we could touch millions of consumers online versus the few hundred that sit down for a live conference. We believe we've helped to make E3 a more vibrant and a cultural touchstone for consumers around the world."

Whether it's inside or outside the convention center, everyone at E3 next week will likely agree on one thing: It's more fun to be there in person.

**More information:** [www.e3expo.com](http://www.e3expo.com)

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