

A new vision for video game consoles

June 22 2016, by Derrik J. Lang



In this June 13, 2016 file photo, members of the media attend a briefing at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles where Microsoft unveiled a new, slimmer version of the video game console coming later this year and a more powerful one that's due in 2017. At last week's Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry teased a future where Xboxes and PlayStations are updated almost as frequently as smartphones. The move to release more consoles with varying features may mark the end of the traditional console cycle era, the decades-old tradition of brand-new systems coming out every seven or so years.(AP Photo/Nick Ut, File)

The next generation of console gaming is coming—or is it?

At last week's Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry forecast a future where Xboxes and PlayStations are updated almost as frequently as smartphones. The move to release more consoles with varying features may mark the end of the traditional console cycle, the decades-old tradition of brand-new systems coming out every seven years or so.

Microsoft offered a glimpse of this potential reality by unveiling the Xbox One S, a slimmer Xbox One set for release in August with an infrared blaster and support for 4K video. The company also hyped Project Scorpio, a more powerful version due in 2017 that will offer virtual reality and 4K gaming. The company said all Xbox One games would work across the three systems.

Ahead of E3, Sony teased it was similarly working on a more powerful PlayStation 4, which it has sold 40 million units of since the console debuted in 2013. The company didn't show off the new PS4 at the industry's annual trade show, but it's expected to also boast 4K gaming. The push for new consoles so soon after the launch of the PS4 and Xbox One is unprecedented.

While console makers have slimmed down Xboxes and PlayStations in the past, they've never featured such dramatic jumps in computing power or new features. The introduction of multiple consoles with varying price tags—the Xbox One S, for example, ranges from \$299 to \$399, depending on the hard drive size—could confuse, fracture or frustrate consumers.

"We're trying to shift the culture and put the power of when to upgrade in the hands of gamers, as opposed to it being driven by technology or a corporate initiative," said Shannon Loftis, head of publishing at

Microsoft Game Studios. "I hope that we don't frustrate gamers. We're responding to them. The feedback we've received is that they want more choices."

For decades, gaming consoles have offered a plug-and-play approach to gaming that's usually cheaper and more accessible than utilizing a PC to play games. The new iterations of the Xbox One and PS4 would simultaneously offer new entry points for untapped consumers and provide preexisting gamers with the chance to upgrade to the latest equipment.

"Our data suggests that gamers spend about \$600 a year on game-related products," said Peter Warman, CEO of interactive industry tracker Newzoo. "I'm sure Sony and Microsoft think they can sell 10 or 20 million more units—or even more than that—rather than just keep the existing hardware out there. The true enthusiasts out there will want the latest hardware."

The announcement of a more powerful Xbox One and PS4 was mostly met with enthusiasm from game developers, who don't expect creating titles for multiple versions of the same system to cost or require more resources. Instead, most game makers see this new generation gap as an opportunity to make better looking games while appealing to more consumers.



This June 15, 2016 file photo, shows a PlayStation VR headset displayed at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles. At the recent Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry teased a future where Xboxes and PlayStations are updated almost as frequently as smartphones. The move to release more consoles with varying features may mark the end of the traditional console cycle era, the decades-old tradition of brand-new systems coming out every seven or so years. (AP Photo/Nick Ut, File)

"I don't see it making games more expensive," said Strauss Zelnick, CEO of Take-Two Interactive. "I think new hardware developments that give us more powerful platforms to work on but are still compatible with the current generation is great news. We're still pushing the envelope on current-gen consoles, so it's not like we're screaming for more power."

It's unclear how Nintendo will factor into this console cycle revolution with next year's planned launch of a system codenamed NX. The

company has yet to demonstrate NX or explain how it will work. It'll likely be a departure from the Wii U, the touchscreen-centric console that failed to take off with gamers. Nintendo has sold less than 13 million units since it debuted in 2012.

"In terms of NX, there's an idea that we're working on," said "Super Mario" and "Donkey Kong" creator Shigeru Miyamoto through a Japanese translator. "That's why we can't share anything at this point, and I don't want to comment on the other companies. If it was just a matter of following advancements in technology, things would be coming out a lot quicker."

For now, it seems console cycles will never be the same again.

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