

Sony tapping virtual reality with PlayStation headset

October 12 2016, by Harumi Ozawa



A man plays a Sony Playstation virtual reality game at the annual Ani-Com show in Hong Kong on July 29, 2016

Sony is set to launch its new virtual reality headset, joining Facebook, Samsung and Google in a market that analysts say could boost the global gaming sector.

The electronics giant—which has been leaning on its videogames

business to claw back to profitability—will start selling its PlayStation virtual reality (PSVR) headset on Thursday in home market Japan and North America.

Priced at \$399, the headset is significantly cheaper than rival offerings and Sony is hoping the gadget will fly off the shelves during the crucial holiday season.

PlayStation VR headsets work with PS4 consoles, more than 40 million of which have been sold globally.

Dozens of software titles for the device are in the pipeline, allowing players to fly like an eagle, drive sports cars in high-speed races, and explore castles.

Gamers can also indulge in fantasy by flirting with virtual females thanks to increasingly realistic VR technology.

But with bulky headsets required to immerse players in the action, virtual reality games with segments lasting just a few minutes are currently the norm.

Developers are trying to determine how far they can extend play without causing fatigue or nausea.

Sony has promised that more than 50 games will be available for the PlayStation VR within months of its launch, including zombie-shooter "Resident Evil", and games based on the "Star Wars" franchise.



Sony's virtual reality headset is priced at \$399, significantly cheaper than rival offerings

Some of the first titles already in store are "Batman: Arkham VR" and "Until Dawn: Rush of Blood", which early reviewers have said use the virtual reality headset successfully to increase the element of surprise and fear for gamers.

Sony is getting a head start because it has a well-established PlayStation brand and the headset works with consoles already sitting in millions of homes, analysts said.

Earlier this year, Facebook-owned Oculus began selling its Rift [virtual reality headsets](#) for \$599, a price which does not include the cost of a computer that can handle the processing and graphics demands of the technology.

Taiwan's HTC set a price of \$799 for Vive VR gear, which also requires computer systems that can handle the rich experience.

Google has unveiled its Daydream View virtual reality headgear that is compatible with smartphones and a direct challenge to Samsung Gear VR.

Microsoft announced Wednesday that it was taking pre-orders for its HoloLens—an augmented reality headset it says will allow users to interact with holograms—and would start shipping the device in November.

— 'Dawn of virtual reality' —

"This year is going to to be the dawn of virtual reality games," said Hiroshi Sakai, a senior analyst at SMBC Friend Research Center.

"Tomorrow's launch could signal the day when VR becomes more mainstream."



Sony's virtual reality headset will hit store shelves for the Christmas shopping season

Sony has not released global sales forecasts for the headsets.

The technology, which is still unfamiliar to many consumers, will likely supplement the industry rather than transform it, Sakai said.

"Instead of being a game-changer, VR is likely to give a boost to the gaming industry," Sakai told AFP.

According to an AFP reporter who had tried the new headset, it was lightweight and comfortable but complicated to install with numerous cables that need to be hooked up to allow it to work.

It may be initially confusing for gamers to adapt their playing style to

[virtual reality](#), the reporter said, and users will also need to buy a PS4 camera, which is not provided.

For Sony, the new headset could be key to driving the PlayStation brand, which is essential to its finances as it recovers from years of losses largely tied to an ailing TV unit and consumer electronics.

As Sony battles to stay ahead of Microsoft's Xbox gaming console, PS4 has seen the fastest and strongest adoption since the first generation of the console was introduced more than 20 years ago.

"(PSVR) is likely to be a significant factor when you look at the bigger picture of Sony's future business," Sakai said.

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