

Ubisoft gets into the social game at Facebook

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Handout image from Ubisoft shows a screen shot of the "TickTock" computer game. The French videogame star Ubisoft made its debut in the online social scene by unveiling "Tick Tock" on Facebook which lets players arm virtual bombs by answering as many multiple-choice questions as possible in a minute about friends on Facebook.

French videogame star Ubisoft on Friday made its debut in the online social scene by unveiling a gaming portal at world-leading social-networking website Facebook.

UbiFriends portal came to life late Friday with a "TickTock" game that playfully challenges Facebook users to show how much they know about their friends.

Ubisoft's social debut came as the popularity of games at Facebook soars and [videogame](#) industry titans grow increasingly interested in creating titles for the social-networking platform.

"We are going to try to make the best game applications for Facebook just like we try to make the best applications for Xbox360 and [Wii](#) and PlayStation," said North American president of Ubisoft Laurent Detoc, referring to videogame

consoles made by Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony respectively.

"TickTock" lets players arm virtual bombs by answering as many multiple-choice questions in a minute as possible about friends on Facebook.

Game software taps into Facebook status updates of players' friends for material for questions.

Virtual explosives range from cherry bombs to nukes and air strikes. "TickTock" bombs are sent to personal animated "warehouses" at an UbiFriends portal linked to Facebook.

People receiving bombs get 60 seconds to defuse them by quickly getting as many correct answers as the senders.

"We are very excited about what Ubisoft is doing here," Facebook platform manager Gareth Davis said while taking part in a demonstration of 'TickTock' at Ubisoft offices in downtown San Francisco.

"Ubisoft is using the social graph people share every day on Facebook to make a fun game uniquely tailored for Facebook users."

Facebook claims 250 million users and says games are the most popular software applications at the service.

Facebook saw a spike in interest from major videogame industry studios after Microsoft announced at a major [Electronic Entertainment Expo](#) this year that [Xbox 360](#) consoles will be able to connect online to Facebook.

"The Xbox announcement was an inflection point where the traditional videogame industry shifted from thinking Facebook was cool to thinking what cool games they can make using Facebook," Davis said.

Facebook is an irresistible platform for Ubisoft given its huge unabated popularity, according to Ubisoft producer Omar Abdelwahed, head of the 'TickTock' team.

"We handle all that for you."

(c) 2009 AFP

"The future of games is obviously digital," Abdelwahed said. "Games are following where software is going, software as a service."

Ubisoft plans to be "everywhere in the realm of entertainment experiences," according to Detoc.

Ubisoft is a believer in the convergence of films and videogames, and last year bought Canadian special effects firm Hybride, which worked on animated action films "300" and "Sin City."

Ubisoft will be releasing this year short films based on its blockbuster "Assassin's Creed" videogame, a sequel to which will be released in November.

Ubisoft is collaborating with famed director James Cameron on a title crafted as an extension of his highly-anticipated 3D movie "Avatar."

Online social networking is a "very important, very big" platform for gaming and Ubisoft is staking out a place there, according to Detoc.

Ubisoft will launch more games at UbiFriends this year and is open to linking to MySpace or other [social-networking](#) services, said Abdelwahed.

'TickTock' is free and Ubisoft is working out how it will make money from social gaming.

When 'TickTock' is announced formally next week, it will have a Twitter channel so people can get text alerts when [Facebook](#) friends send them virtual bombs.

UbiFriends is being hosted online at Google App Engine, so the Internet giant has servers ready to handle gameplay loads should 'TickTock' go "viral" as Ubisoft hopes.

"You could have a few thousand users or see your traffic go to a couple of million users," said Google App Engine product manager Mike Repass.

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