

Disney unveils own 'Skylanders'-like franchise

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This undated publicity photo released by Walt Disney Company shows the video game, Disney Infinity: Monsters University Play Set. (AP Photo/Walt Disney Company)

Captain Jack Sparrow driving Cinderella's carriage? Mr. Incredible swinging the Queen of Hearts' flamingo mallet? Sulley from "Monsters, Inc." galloping around on Bullseye from "Toy Story"? Those are just a few of the silly scenarios that could become a virtual reality with "Disney Infinity," a new endeavor from Disney combining a video game with a toy line.

The [Walt Disney Co.](#) revealed plans Tuesday to launch what it's billing as a new [gaming platform](#) that's strikingly similar to Activision's successful "Skylanders" franchise.

"Infinity" will blend real-life toy figures depicting various Disney personalities with a sprawling virtual world where those same characters can do stuff like race cars, play games and construct buildings together, as well as go on adventures in their own realms.

"Infinity" will be available for the [Xbox 360](#), [PlayStation 3](#), Wii, Wii U, PC, online and on tablets and smartphones. It's being crafted by Disney-owned developer Avalanche Software, which created the 2010 game based on "Toy Story 3." That game's "toy box" mode served as inspiration for what eventually became "Infinity."

Akin to "Skylanders," the plastic figures have the ability to store data and transmit characters' histories through a reader. Also like "Skylanders," the toys can work between consoles, meaning a Mr. Incredible figure can seamlessly go from a PS3 in your living room to the [Wii](#) in your friend's basement.

The game is essentially divided into two modes: "play sets," featuring structured adventures where gamers can collect vehicles, scenery, gadgets and more; and the "toy box," an unstructured open world where users' imaginations can run wild, much like the games such as "Minecraft" and "LittleBigPlanet." Both modes allow for gamers to play cooperatively or online together.

"Infinity" serves as something of a homecoming for Disney's very different heroes. While disparate Disney characters can sometimes be spotted together in theme parks, on ice or the merchandising world, they're rarely united within any of Disney's fictional domains.

Was there some uneasiness about not only aligning these diverse properties, but also giving up control of such beloved creations to users?

"The truthful answer is yes," said John Pleasants, co-president at Disney Interactive. "There was both apprehension and excitement. In the end, excitement and the potential for new opportunities won over. It wasn't without a lot of conversations with a lot of stakeholders though."



This undated publicity photo released by the Walt Disney Company shows the video game, Disney Infinity: The Toy Box. (AP Photo/Walt Disney Company)

Fictionally, the characters depicted in "Infinity" are not the actual characters themselves but the real-world toys come to life on screen. To that end, the figures all maintain the same toy-inspired style, more apparent in the scallywags from "Pirates of the Caribbean" than say the playthings from "Toy Story," and the game's graphics are equally toy-like.

"Infinity" is set to debut in June, along with "Monsters University," the 3-D sequel to the 2001 Disney-Pixar film "Monsters, Inc."

Despite the continued success of the Disney Co. as a whole, Disney's interactive division, responsible for games like the console adventure "Epic Mickey" and the online [virtual world](#) "Club Penguin," operated at a loss last year. If "Infinity" becomes as financially successful as "Skylanders," it could provide a much needed boost to Disney Interactive.

"We believe that 2013 is an important year for us," said Pleasants. "This is the biggest initiative we're investing in this year, and we hope it will have a positive impact on generating profit this year."

A starter pack for "Infinity" will include the game, reader, play set piece and three figures: Sulley of "Monsters University," Captain Jack Sparrow of "Pirates of the Caribbean" and Mr. Incredible of "The Incredibles." Pleasants said the starter pack will cost \$74.99, the same price as the "Skylanders: Giants" starter pack released last year.

"Infinity" will initially launch with 17 figures (\$12.99 a piece, or \$29.99 for a three-pack) and 20 power discs (\$4.99 a pack).



This undated publicity photo released by the Walt Disney Company shows the video game, Disney Infinity: Pirates of the Caribbean Play Set. (AP Photo/Walt Disney Company)

The power discs can be placed on the reader to provide new items and power-ups. For example, slipping the disc for Fix-It Felix Jr.'s hammer from "Wreck-It Ralph" underneath Davy Jones from "Pirates of the Caribbean" will raise the captain's ability to deal damage.

Disney sees "Infinity" as a long-term platform with a plan to release new figures, play sets and power discs over the next several years.

"Within 'Infinity,' we will leverage Disney characters from the past, present and future—and we will continue to do so in the future," said Pleasants. "You will see us bring things to 'Infinity' from the vault, as well as launch things that do not yet exist today."

Disney is clearly taking a cue from Activision with "Infinity," injecting the toys-meets-games genre with its own characters and locales—and perhaps smartly so. Activision Blizzard Inc. revealed last week that its

"Skylanders" franchise crossed the \$500 million mark in U.S. retail sales, outselling top action figure lines from franchises such as the WWE and "Star Wars."

Pleasants noted that "Infinity" is driving past the innovations that Activision originally made when it launched the genre with "Skylanders" in 2011. He said that unlike "Skylanders," "[Infinity](#)" will boast several different styles of gameplay that will obviously draw from the wealth of Disney creations. The play set for "The Incredibles," for example, is more focused on action than the one for "Monsters University," where stealthiness is the name of the game.

"We have some pretty interesting things up our sleeve online and on mobile that we'll be doing," said Pleasants, "We think they will be really different than what 'Skylanders' has done."

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