

Fans in focus at major E3 video game trade show

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Video game giant Electronic Arts on Saturday courted fans with titles such as "Star Wars Battlefront" and snatched the spotlight ahead of a major industry trade show in Los Angeles.

Gamers who have become stars on YouTube for streamed play or commentary joined EA executives in the Hollywood Palladium to provide world premier glimpses into eagerly awaited games.

The event kicked off a three-day "fan fest" where people can get tastes of coming games. EA Live will end on the eve of the official start of the historically trade-only Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3).

"There is a lot of interest in the industry to speak more directly to the gamer," Sony Interactive Entertainment worldwide studios chairman Shawn Layden told AFP.

E3 took the unusual step this year of making about 15,000 tickets available at \$149 each for fans to explore the show floor and attend panels.

EA held the first of a series of press events by console and game makers in the days leading up to E3.

Games showed off included blockbuster shooter "Battlefield" and a sequel to a "Star Wars Battlefront" game that met with criticism after its release about two years ago.

"We got a lot of feedback; a lot of it positive and a lot of it constructive," EA chief executive Andrew Wilson quipped on stage.

"That is a euphemism for not as positive."

Endless play

EA provided a glimpse at what appeared to be a new science fiction shooter work titled "Anthem" from BioWare and a character driven, buddy prison break game called "A Way Out" that can only be played cooperatively with a friend.

EA's fan-fest comes as the [video game](#) industry flourishes and shifts to cultivating ongoing relationships with players instead of simply selling them blockbuster games in packages or as digital downloads.

Historically an event exclusively for the industry, E3 appeared to be adapting to the trend of [game makers](#) building ongoing relationships with players in online communities.

"E3 is evolving to try to bring in people who are not involved in the industry, who are fans," said Ted Pollak, senior [video game industry](#) analyst at Jon Peddie Research.

Netflix-style games

Hot trends at E3 next week will include the rise of streaming games, to be played subscription-style as a service or to be watched as spectator sports on the booming 'eSports' stage.



The personal computer has quietly become the most played and money-generating platform for games, according to analysts.

Amazon-owned Twitch and Google's YouTube are once again at E3, streaming announcements, game trailers, interviews and other game-content to viewers around the world.

Microsoft just launched a subscription service for Xbox, letting players pay a monthly fee for access to a library of video games for its console.

People who already subscribe to an Xbox Gold service can pay an extra \$10 monthly for the new "Game Pass."

Sony makes video games available as part of a subscription service for PlayStation consoles.

"Most important for the console space at the moment is the concept of games as a service," said © 2017 AFP NPD video games analyst Mat Piscatella.

"Games are now designed around keeping people engaged for years."

Dueling consoles

E3 will once again be an arena for competing consoles from Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony to battle it out.

Sony PlayStation 4 has dominated the market, while Nintendo's recently-launched Switch has been a hit, with fans snapping up the console and a "Legend of Zelda" game that has become a must-play title.

Microsoft is to spotlight a muscular new Xbox model, referred to in development as "Scorpio," at a special E3 press event on Sunday.

PS4 and Xbox One are both performing better in the market than their respective predecessors, and Nintendo "is back in a big way" with Switch, according to Piscatella.

Meanwhile, the personal computer has quietly become the most played and money-generating platform for games, according to analysts.

"The juggernaut of PC gaming can't be hidden any more," Pollak said.

The makers of chips for graphics and computing 'rigs' for play are among those strutting wares at E3.

"It seems every segment in the [video game market](#) is going pretty darn well and there is a lot of room for optimism," Piscatella said.

The Electronic Software Association behind E3, with help from NPD, pegged overall spending in the US video [game](#) market at \$30.4 billion last year.

"You have people of all ages and genders playing games more than they have before; it has become more ingrained in our culture than ever," Piscatella said.

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