

OnLive game streaming service to start in June

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In an industry first, a new gaming service will start allowing people to "stream" popular games over the Internet in June, using a mechanism similar to watching TV shows or listening to music online.

OnLive, unveiled a year ago with much fanfare, embraces "cloud computing," in which software runs on a computer elsewhere, not on the player's own PC or game console.

That means players can buy or rent high-end games such as "Mass Effect 2" with even older, less powerful computers and Macs and without owning such consoles as the Xbox 360 or the PlayStation 3.

Right now, players purchase discs to pop into such consoles. And increasingly, many game publishers are selling additional content, such as extra episodes for popular games, as Internet downloads. Services such as Direct2Drive, meanwhile, sell downloads of full games to PCs, though gamers need powerful, high-end machines.

Console makers have generally been skeptical about OnLive's threat to their business. But if it works, the company's foray into streaming could be another force nudging the industry beyond discs toward digitally consumed content.

OnLive Inc. said Wednesday it will start offering its service for personal computers on June 17 for \$14.95 a month. Buying or renting games will cost extra, but the company did not disclose pricing.

In addition, OnLive will launch its "MicroConsole" — a cheap, cassette-sized adapter that plugs into a TV set to stream games — at a later date. Pricing was not announced. OnLive expects the tiny console to be more popular than its PC and Mac streaming service.

"We want to slow the impact of people jumping on to our servers just a little bit," said founder and CEO Steve Perlman.

One of the biggest questions for OnLive has been whether the company's servers and players' broadband connections would be able to handle streaming without a lag that would disrupt playing. Perlman said it's working, and "assuming you have a decent Internet connection," gamers who've been testing the service are "playing normally."

Streaming video games is a bigger challenge than music and movies, because games cannot be easily compressed into smaller files before streaming over the Internet. That's because video games are interactive, requiring instant responses

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from the game to players. When you shoot at an enemy, for example, the game must respond in a split second and show whether you've hit or missed.

OnLive says it has come up with a new form of compression that lets its game servers communicate with players over broadband connections in real time.

OnLive said its service will offer new games from publishers such as Electronic Arts Inc., Ubisoft, Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. and Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Activision Blizzard Inc., publisher of the popular "Call of Duty" games, is noticeably absent from its list. OnLive says it is in "ongoing discussions" with Activision.

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On the Net:

<http://www.onlive.com>

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