

US video game sales up 3 percent in February

The Associated Press

U.S. retail sales of video-game hardware, software and accessories edged up 3 percent in February compared with the same month last year, helped in part by strong sales of Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 game system and Kinect motion-sensing controller.

Market researcher NPD Group said Thursday \$1.36 billion was spent on video games, consoles, portable devices and accessories in February, compared with \$1.33 billion in February 2010.

In dollars, sales of game consoles and accessories both posted solid increases from a year ago. NPD said the Xbox 360 had its best non-holiday-season month ever, and bundled sales of the Xbox 360 console and Kinect helped push up average selling prices among console hardware. The exception: portable video-game devices, which saw sales plunge 27 percent in February as shoppers anticipate Nintendo's new portable 3DS.

Accessories include add-ons such as the Kinect, but also "points cards" that game players can use to buy new game content or use as virtual currency in games. NPD analyst Anita Frazier said points cards made up 22 percent of accessory sales in February — about \$57 million, a 52 percent increase from a year earlier.

Sales of software — the video games themselves — for consoles, portables and personal computers slipped 8 percent. NPD does not include game downloads in its monthly sales data, so the numbers can show a decline even if more people are playing games.

"Full game and add-on content digital downloads, social network gaming, and consumer purchases of mobile apps are some of the areas where we've seen the greatest percentage growth over last year," Frazier said in a statement.

"Call of Duty: Black Ops" from Activision Blizzard Inc. was the No. 1 game in February, and NPD group calls it the best-selling game ever. "Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds" from Capcom USA, which went on sale in February, was the second-best-selling game, followed by "Just Dance 2" for the Wii, from Ubisoft.

Looking ahead, Frazier noted that Easter falls in late April this year, and she expects to count holiday-related sales in April's report. Last year, Easter was much earlier and holiday-related sales were mostly counted in March.

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