

Late 'Madden' saps August video game sales

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U.S. retail sales of video game hardware, software and accessories fell 21 percent in August to \$649 million, according to market researcher NPD Group, partly because the popular "Madden NFL 12" released later in the month than usual.

In its monthly report, the NPD Group said Thursday that video game software sales — which refers to sales of the games themselves — sank 34 percent in August to \$265 million, compared with nearly \$404 million in August 2010.

NPD analyst Anita Frazier said much of this drop stemmed from video game publisher Electronic Arts Inc.'s decision to release its latest "Madden" football game, "Madden NFL 12," at the end of August, which is later than it usually rolls out a new version of the game. She added that the next several months includes a "strong release schedule" and that full-year game sales may end up flat or up slightly compared with 2010.

The research firm does not include game downloads and online games in its monthly retail sales data, so the numbers can sometimes show a decline even if more people are playing games on Facebook, their mobile phones and elsewhere.

Sales of video game hardware, which includes hand-held game systems and gaming consoles such as Nintendo Co.'s Wii and Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360, dropped 12 percent to \$249 million from \$283 million a year earlier. Sales of video game accessories inched down 1 percent to \$135 million.

Adding in sales of PC games, overall U.S. sales dropped 23 percent overall to \$670 million.

The top-selling games during the month included "Deus Ex: Human Revolution" from Square Enix Inc., "NCAA Football 12" from Electronic Arts Inc. and "Call of Duty: Black Ops" from Activision Blizzard Inc.

For the current month, Frazier expects "Madden NFL 12" to take the top spot.

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