Sony pumps life into PS Vita, Move controller

RYAN NAKASHIMA - AP Business Writer - Associated Press

Sony Corp. has breathed new life into its handheld Vita and announced a tie-up with author J.K. Rowling that could cause Harry Potter fans to fly on broomsticks into the world of games.

The Japanese console maker indicated Monday it could be years before it comes up with new version of its PlayStation. But at the world's biggest video game expo, E3, it announced plenty to keep gamers busy this coming holiday season.

Sony unveiled plans for a second-screen function for the Vita that keeps it in step with Nintendo's new tablet-controller-equipped console, Wii U. It also presented a Harry Potter-inspired book game called "Wonderbook: Book of Spells" that turns the Move motion controller into a magic wand.

Jack Tretton, the president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, suggested it may be a few more years before a new PlayStation console is due. He told a packed Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena that Sony's 6-year-old machine "continues to shatter expectations" and called it "the industry's most powerful palate" for game-makers.

"Back to the original PlayStation we always thought in 10-year product life cycles," he said in an interview with The Associated Press after Sony's E3 news conference. "I think you're seeing those generations be longer and longer because the technology is so great, it's difficult to surpass it."

A few games did appear to defy expectations even on the aging console.

"Beyond," which Sony showcased to kick off its 75-minute presentation, depicts "Juno" star Ellen Page in much more authentic animated acting scenes than were seen in its 2010 predecessor, "Heavy Rain," which was also from game studio Quantic Dream.

Sony also demonstrated a raft of "first-person shooter" games that were shockingly violent but could please hard-core gamers, including "The Last of Us" by studio Naughty Dog.

"Technically, there's some really impressive stuff," said John Davison, vice president of programming for GameSpot.com. "We're seeing all publishers really stretching out this generation of hardware."

The video-game industry is seeking to reverse a five-month slump in U.S. sales dragged down mainly by a lack of new hardware.

Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s Wii is 5 years old. Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 is 6. Only Nintendo

is coming out with a new console this year.

All three console makers sought to use mobile devices with another screen in tandem with their consoles.

Sony unveiled plans to bolster the Vita's use with PlayStation 3 consoles by making use of its front and back touch screens and giving different players different perspectives in the same game. New game "PlayStation All-Stars: Battle Royale" allows PS Vita players to fight PlayStation 3 players over the Internet in real time.

Sony has sold 1.8 million PS Vitas worldwide since the handheld was launched in December in Japan and February in North America. That's relatively small when considering there are 65 million PlayStation 3s in the world and 13 million Move controllers sold.

"We realize that it's a marathon and not a sprint," Tretton said. "I'll stack up our success against other 4-month-old platforms."

The use of a second screen with a controller mimics plans by Nintendo Co. Ltd. to sell a tablet-like touchscreen controller with its Wii U, which is expected to launch later this year.

It also resembles Microsoft Corp.'s SmartGlass feature, unveiled earlier Monday, which makes use of smartphones to control video content.

Sony also announced that Taiwan's HTC will be the first smartphone maker to use its newly named PlayStation Mobile platform for Android-based games.

Sony's dark horse announcement was its partnership with author J.K. Rowling.

"Wonderbook: Book of Spells" turns its PlayStation Move motion controller into a magic wand and comes with a book of spells, presented as if written by fictional spellbook writer Miranda Goshawk over 200 years ago. Gamers wave the wand in prescribed patterns as if they are a Hogwarts student on their way to becoming a witch or wizard and learn how to cast spells that make fire, unlock gates and move through new stories written by Rowling.

"Wonderbook: Book of Spells is the closest a Muggle can come to a real spellbook," Rowling said in a statement.

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