

Game on: Sony re-enters VR headset fray

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Sony's first virtual reality headset remained a niche product for the brand.

Consumer tech giant Sony is launching a virtual reality (VR) headset for its PlayStation on Wednesday, six and a half years after its last attempt to crack a market that is still struggling to gain a widespread public following.

The devices have periodically generated huge excitement in the geekier

fringes of the tech and business spheres, with Facebook's \$2 billion takeover of the start-up Oculus in 2014 sparking a mini-boom.

And media reports have swirled that Apple is about to unveil its own version, a move feverishly anticipated by fans of the brand.

But VR [headset](#) makers do not yet shift enough units to sustain the hype.

Fewer than 10 million shipped worldwide in 2022, all brands combined, according to CSC Insights. By comparison, Sony claims to have sold 30 million PlayStation 5 consoles last year.

And for now, VR headsets are expensive and the fast-developing technology gets dated quickly.

But that has not put Sony off.

"We think it's the right time to offer a new, more technologically advanced headset, based on feedback from our first model," said Nathalie Dacquin, marketing director for PlayStation in France.

So can one of the big beasts of tech drag a stubbornly niche product into the mainstream?

Games will be key

The PS VR2 certainly improves on its predecessor—it is lighter and displays finer and more fluid images.

But one aspect of the Sony gadget that will not revolutionize the market is the price—weighing in at \$550.

Two of the flagship models currently on the market, the Quest 2 by Meta

and the PICO 4, are priced at around \$400.

And the PICO 4, developed by ByteDance, the Chinese owner of TikTok, is unavailable in the United States.

But what Sony has over the competition is the PlayStation, and roughly 30 games will be compatible with the new headset, including the racing simulator "Gran Turismo Sport".

"These are obviously the games that will make the headset a success," Dacquin said.

Prices will fall

But experts are not seeing a revolution quite yet.

More companies with products in different price brackets could help to shake up the market in the longer term, said Rick Kowalski of the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), which organizes the CES tech show in Las Vegas.

"Competition and economies of scale tend to bring prices down over time," he said.

But there are still plenty of barriers to a wider uptake.

Rolf Illenberger of VRDirect, a [consulting firm](#), said [technology advances](#) make the devices outdated at a rapid pace.

Customers who buy flashy headsets "tend to be quite disappointed" when they find out a few months later that a new generation is already out and their version is no longer properly supported, he said.

He reckons the headsets are still best deployed in technical and corporate settings.

"Aside from gaming, it does not yet offer a sufficient content lineup for people to be attracted to this technology on a regular basis," he said.

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