

Four Xbox exclusives heading to rivals in big shift

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The head of Microsoft's Xbox team says it is not changing its 'fundamental' strategy of exclusive video games but wants to reach as many players as possible with strategic decisions.

Microsoft on Thursday shook up the video game world with word it is

making some once-exclusive Xbox video games available for play on rival consoles.

Xbox head Phil Spencer did not specify which titles were expanding beyond the Xbox, but the Verge, citing unnamed sources, said they will be "Hi-Fi Rush", "Pentiment", "Sea of Thieves" and "Grounded."

"Over the next five or 10 years, games that are exclusive to one piece of hardware are going to be a smaller and smaller part of the game industry," Spencer said in a podcast.

But Xbox is not changing its "fundamental exclusive strategy," with "no promise" of more games to follow, he said.

"So if you're on those other platforms, and you see these four games coming, please don't take it as some signal that everything's coming. It's not."

The move comes as Microsoft looks to boost Xbox sales that have lagged those of Sony PlayStation consoles, and to ramp up revenue from subscriptions to its cloud gaming service.

By putting its weight behind software and subscriptions, Xbox could be trying to match the success of TV streaming giant Netflix.

Xbox, PlayStation and Nintendo have long competed to be the console of choice, with exclusive blockbuster titles from their own studios or in deals with other game makers.

Outside studios, in contrast, typically seek to reach the broadest number of gamers with big-name titles playable on all consoles and Windows-powered computers (PCs).

"Why did Xbox wait one week and let their entire community have a meltdown if the only thing worth reporting was that four smallish titles are going to go multi-platform?" wrote a member of a Reddit forum devoted to the Spencer podcast.

Another member of the forum argued this is just the start of Xbox games heading for PlayStation and other rivals.

"This is a major deal," the forum member wrote.

"When they started porting games to PC they said it would only be a few and now look at it."

PlayStation challenger

Circana video games executive director Mat Piscatella said Xbox is continuing a strategy of expanding access to titles—particularly those that make more money the bigger the online community of players.

If Microsoft-owned blockbusters such as "Minecraft" and "Call of Duty" remain playable on an array of platforms, freeing up small Xbox games in a similar fashion is not industry-shaking, Piscatella cautioned.

Spending on video game content, hardware and accessories in the United States reached \$57.2 billion in 2023, according to market tracker Circana.

Money spent on video game hardware was \$6.6 billion, with PlayStation 5 sales offsetting declines of Xbox and Nintendo Switch purchases, Circana reported.

"Hogwarts Legacy"—which is available on multiple platforms—was the top-selling game of last year in the United States.

Similar moves are unlikely any time soon at Microsoft's Japanese gaming rivals Sony and Nintendo, said Serkan Toto, CEO of Tokyo-based consultancy Kantan Games.

"I don't think Sony is under pressure to bring their exclusive hits to rival Microsoft," Toto told AFP.

"Sony is in some way a multi-platform developer already, as you can play several of their PlayStation blockbusters on the PC."

And forget Mario or Pokemon ever coming to the PC or PlayStation: "Nintendo will never give up on their exclusives, as their own games are absolutely critical for the company's identity," he said.

"It's economic pressure that made Microsoft bring a first batch of Xbox games to other platforms... Microsoft has been number three following Sony and Nintendo for years now, and they have now decided it's time for a big move."

Sales from Xbox content and services were up 61 percent in the final three months of last year, driven mostly by Microsoft's acquisition of "Call of Duty" maker Activision Blizzard, according to quarterly earnings figures.

Microsoft launched its blockbuster takeover in January 2022, an acquisition that made it the world's third-largest gaming company by revenue.

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