

Could PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X be swansong for consoles?

6 November 2020, by Jules Bonnard



The release of new consoles by Sony and Microsoft is set to be a sales slam dunk with consumers seeking entertainment during pandemic confinement

The upcoming release of a ninth generation of video game consoles by Sony and Microsoft is set to be a sales slam dunk with consumers seeking entertainment during pandemic confinement, but could it also be their swansong as the habits of gamers change?

Both companies have been dripping out information for months about the PlayStation 5 (PS5) and the Xbox Series X to build excitement, and gamers will be able to start getting their hands on them next week.

In a sign of the keen anticipation of gamers, the allotted pre-orders for the consoles at major retailers were quickly snapped up and both companies expect high demand in the run-up to the end of the year.

Sony has said it expects to sell 7.6 million PS5 consoles through the end of March, beating the sales performance of the PS4.

And it will be a major upgrade in terms of hardware—the current generation of consoles were released back in 2013.

Both new consoles will offer much more powerful central and graphics processors, support 4K televisions, as well as offer ray tracing, which allows for better rendition of how light behaves.

"When one looks at the technical specifications of the new consoles, they are 10 times above the current generation. We're going to have games that are more beautiful, more realistic, more immersive. People are going to be blown away," said Charles-Louis Planade, a video game expert with Midcap Partners.

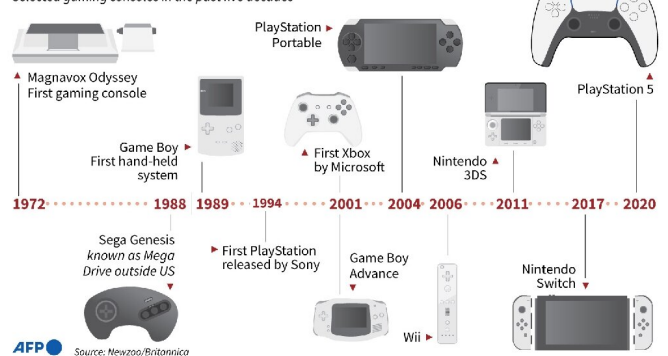
Dark cloud in the sky?

Sony sold 110 million PS4 consoles over the past seven years, more than double the number of its competitor the Xbox One.

Evolution of the game console

There are 2.7 billion gamers worldwide, according to Newzoo

Selected gaming consoles in the past five decades



Timeline of selected gaming consoles.

"For Microsoft, the challenge is to not let Sony get too far ahead—maybe even the game with them,"

Planade told AFP.

Taking into account the growing number of players, the analyst believes they could even match their previous success.

Others aren't so sure given the changes in the industry, which is already beginning to move away from big expensive machines to cloud gaming.

"This generation could be the last physical consoles. It'll be the last time we'll hear talk of teraflops," said Audrey Leprince, co-founder of the independent game studio The Game Bakers.

A teraflop refers to the capacity of a processor to calculate a trillion operations, and both Sony and Microsoft have been vaunting the speed and power of their new consoles.

Leprince said there haven't been any major innovations with game interfaces or with the games themselves.

But "the stone in the pond... is the shift to the [subscription model](#)" which means the [console](#) makers are becoming a "Netflix of video games", she said.

The subscriptions—Game Pass for Microsoft and PlayStation Plus for Sony "are going to completely revolutionise the industry as was the case for films and music," said Leprince.

"The challenge for the console manufacturers is to hold onto their subscribers so as not to give an opening to challengers" such as Google or Amazon, said Planade.



Both companies have been dripping out information for months about the PlayStation 5 and the Xbox Series X

'A transition phase'

The two web giants are betting on cloud gaming which allows them to dispense with consoles. The games can run on a variety of devices such as smartphones and tablets.

Because the servers in the cloud do the heavy lifting in terms of processing, there is no need for powerful and costly consoles.

But both firms have also taken a step towards cloud gaming by offering lower priced versions of their new consoles without drives. Games have to be downloaded from the web or streamed, and have dedicated xCloud and PlayStation Now services.

"We're in a transition phase" said Laurent Michaud,

an analyst specialising in the video [game](#) industry, who expects consoles and cloud gaming to coexist for a while.

The "trends indicate that this won't be the last generation of consoles," he believes.

Many gamers value playing on big, high resolution screens, and publishers are going to want to exploit 8K televisions which offer a much superior experience.

"Networks, even in a few years, won't be rapid enough to transport" images for 8K screens, noted Michaud.

With "technology putting all the manufacturers on the same level" it is the catalogue of games "that will be even more important than in the past for the success of this generation."

Both Sony and Microsoft have lined up a number of eagerly awaited games to launch with the consoles.

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