

Wii want to play

It's a huge year for Nintendo, Microsoft, Sony, and gaming, writes Jennifer Dudley

SONY, Nintendo and Microsoft were playing games last week. All three revealed innovative next-generation consoles and services, the likes of which games had only dreamed of.

Sony's PlayStation 3, Nintendo's Wii and Microsoft's new Live Anywhere service were revealed over colourful demonstrations at the E3 games expo in Los Angeles.

Flight simulators were displayed on flat-panel screens, virtual tennis matches held, alien-busters revealed and Nintendo even unveiled Super Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto as an orchestra conductor to demonstrate its new controller.

But despite the hype and hoopla, this is no game. The companies are vying for control of an industry predicted to be worth \$45 billion by 2008, according to IDC Intelligence.

On the home front, the next generation of computer games will set up more money than ever before, with one console costing almost \$1000 before you buy a single game.

Despite the high price, thousands of Australians are expected to buy the new hardware. The innovations will change the way we play and the number of people playing.

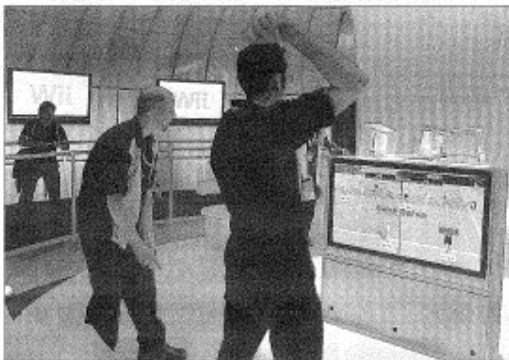
Of all three announcements, the most anticipated of E3 was the unveiling of PlayStation 3.

PlayStation 3 is the leading games console in Australia, according to GfK, so expectations of the new console have been high.

Sony has been releasing details of the new console since last year and it appears to have lived up to expectations.

A black, smooth-edged box, the PS3 includes a revolutionary Cell processor, as promised. The chip is said to deliver two teraflops of super-fast performance.

Along with high-definition 1080p video games the promised built-in HD Blu-ray DVD player.



Virtual tennis: Nintendo gamers play tennis using the new Wii home console.

Picture: AFP

The basic model has a 20GB hard drive, and will be launched in Australia on November 17 with a price of \$829. The 60GB model will set users back \$999.

IDC Australia research analyst Sophie Lo says the lofty cost of the console may deter some buyers.

Many gamers' loyalty to the PlayStation brand will ensure they hold their line until its launch, she says, but others will keep their current console or invest in Microsoft's cheaper Xbox 360, which costs up to \$649.95.

"Pricing the PS3 at a premium of \$200 to \$300 more than the Xbox 360 is definitely a risk, especially when Microsoft is catching up with Sony from the content perspective," Lo says.

And Sony's PlayStation controllers have been reborn. Instead of driving games on the new console just by pressing buttons and moving joysticks, users will be able to wave controllers around and have the motion register on screen.

The controllers include a six-axis sensing system that registers roll, pitch and yaw. In a flight simulation,

for instance, pulling up the controllers makes the plane lift, lean sideways, and the plane follows.

And Sony isn't the only company to introduce motion controls.

Fans have long speculated about the company's Wii (pronounced Wee) console, and most rumours have been correct. Users will navigate games with a rectangular, sensor-controlled device.

SENSING motion. Wii users will be able to control the game by putting their body into it or, as Nintendo describes it, "the swing of your arm, not the movement of your thumb, causes a baseball to leave the park or a sword to find its mark".

Nintendo demonstrated this in a virtual tennis match, in which players swing the Wii remote as if it was a tennis racket.

The Wii remote will also have a speaker for 3D sound, and the console will connect to the internet.

The release date and price are not yet known, but rumours put the cost at \$200 to \$250.

Lo says the platform with the best-

looking games will become the most popular, regardless of its features.

And she says the Wii will not necessarily compete directly with the PS3 and Xbox 360 for domination because it mainly attracts players aged eight to 15.

But the fight between the remaining two is likely to be more competitive than ever, she says, because Microsoft will have an eight-month lead on Sony in Australia, and even longer in America and Japan.

To capitalise on that lead, Microsoft announced more developments for the Xbox 360 at E3. And it revealed a radical expansion of its online service, Xbox Live.

From early next year, Live Anywhere will allow gamers to compete with one another whether they are using an Xbox 360, a Windows-based PC or a mobile phone.

Its launch will coincide with the planned launch of the new Microsoft Windows operating system. Vista. It's a huge year for gaming.

DISC JOCKEY



DVD
Bob Dylan: 1975-1981: Rolling Thunder and The Gospel Years
MCA

Why you should own it: This four-year unreleased documentary chronicles what is considered to be Dylan's most creative but also highly troubled period.

In 1975 the maestro hit the highway and toured small venues backed by a select group of musicians.

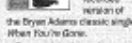
The Rolling Thunder Reunited reached its apogee with a farewell concert that was held for musician Carter at Madison Square Garden.

By 1978 Dylan had found his way to Jesus and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship Church.

The creative course of this era were three gospel albums. Though this DVD is billed with more photos and insightful interviews with key members of Rolling Thunder, Dylan is rarely shown.

Extra: Interview with Hurricane Carter, one of the Vineyard Church and Dylan's home town of Hibarna.

CD
Dylan Adams Anthology
Universal Music



Why you should own it: Just to hear the re-recorded version of the Dylan Adams classic single When You're Gone.

To complete this make-over Adams evaded Spice Girl Mel C's vocals and utterly misled them with those sung by Pamela Anderson.

But this two-CD release comprises 36 tracks, three of which are new recordings, ensuring Adams fans get lots further money.

PETER FAMILIAN