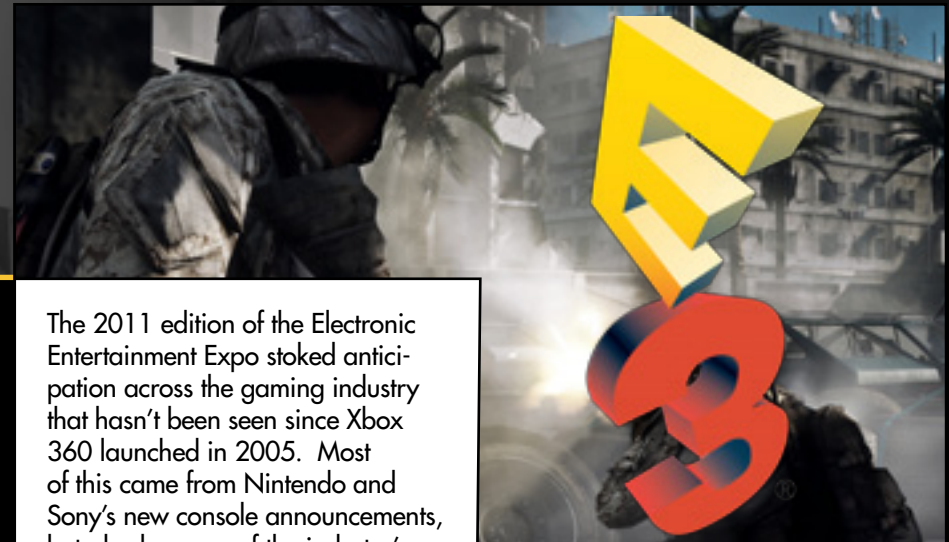


# IN THIS ISSUE



# PLAYED

JUNE 2011 - THE E3 RECAP ISSUE



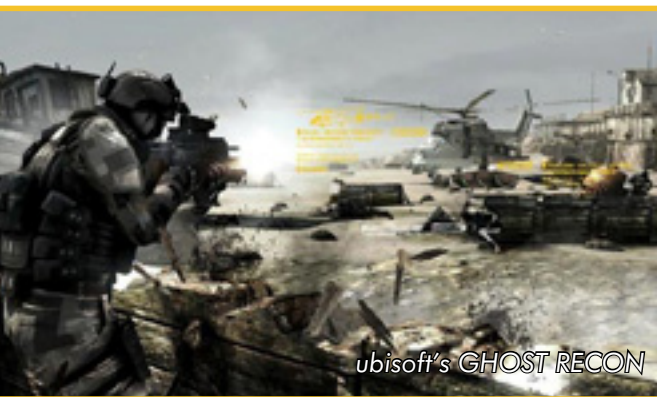
The 2011 edition of the Electronic Entertainment Expo stoked anticipation across the gaming industry that hasn't been seen since Xbox 360 launched in 2005. Most of this came from Nintendo and Sony's new console announcements, but also because of the industry's continued outward growth. With new gamers born across various devices everyday, **the core console scene is shifting to connect their enthusiast audience with players accustomed to accessible, casual experiences.** We check out how inside. Also, we look at how publishers are keeping their products close to the chest during E3 and planning farther ahead into the hype and release schedule, **changing the E3 experience for everyone.**

We also noticed a trend toward the younger set, with **games geared toward kids moved front and center**, while also **seeing brands with loose affiliations to games joining the E3 party.** All in all, a stellar show, as usual. However, the shift away from the core-focused enthusiasts never felt more evident. Gaming is universal and we'll see why in this month's E3-themed PLAYED.



PLAYED is Denuo's monthly look at the major headlines and evolving trends in gaming's ever-changing landscape. With insight from our gaming industry experts, PLAYED will keep you in the know when it comes to the expansive and entertaining world of gaming.

## LET'S PLAY TOGETHER



Gaming culture has long been like one big party happening in two giant rooms. In one room, you have the core gamer, set in his gaming ways and devoted to the complexities and technological feats gaming offers year over year. In the other, the accessible gamer, who loves games without saying he loves games, always searching for a quick hit of gameplay to fill the off moments of the day. The industry has propagated this rift by developing games and platforms that reach out directly to these distinct groups of gamers. While Xbox and PlayStation are content challenging the core crowd, Nintendo has seen incredible success by cultivating the casual gamer with their DS and Wii platforms. However, Nintendo has seen the Wii slip in sales consistently over the past year while Xbox and PlayStation catch up via services and technology that appeals to the accessible gaming trends, like Kinect and PS Move. Still, though, the rift remains.

This year, the gaming heavyweights, facing competition with each other and outside companies like Facebook and Apple, made large strides toward putting their consoles front and center in every kind of gamer's mind. With everyone gaming in one way or another these days, it makes sense to build and adapt platforms that invite all kinds of players, casual and core alike, to play. Microsoft's Kinect is a perfect example of adapting to the demands of consumers, bringing casual gameplay into newer, futuristic waters through gesture-based control. Despite selling over 10 million units in its first year of existence, the device has long been viewed with skepticism by core gamers looking for little change in their control schemes and game mechanics. This year, Microsoft is working toward making Kinect a tool that reaches across both casual and core gamers, introducing new mechanics into core titles like *Mass Effect 3* and *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* that complement controller-based gameplay with unique interactive elements such as voice control or motion-based interaction in menus and subscreens. While it isn't a huge step toward core-agnostic experiences on Kinect, it's enough to gear Kinect toward being as important a device for the core consumer as it has been for accessible gamers.

Sony's Move controller has been fairly successful for the PlayStation platform. Similar to Kinect's casual connection but with more in common with Wii's motion control systems, Move has expanded the PS3's push into the living room as more than a Blu-ray player since its 2010 launch. On the handheld side, with a lackluster launch for the Nintendo 3DS, Sony is hoping to capture the on-the-go gamer who loves iPhone and DS games with its recently-announced **PS Vita**, an evolution of their waning PlayStation Portable handheld device. Sony's history of offering best-in-class tech holds true here, giving handheld gamers an OLED touchscreen, a rear-facing multitouch panel, and a chipset that pushes graphics comparable to some PlayStation 3 titles. Despite being a powerful little device, the Vita plans to bring both robust game experiences alongside smaller, bite-sized mobile games similar to iOS and Android titles, via its PSP Mini and PlayStation Store extensions. A competitive \$250 price point supports Sony's aggressive plans to get their handheld in as many hands and pockets as possible, establishing itself as the entertainment device of choice for nomad gamers everywhere.



Of the big three console stakeholders, Nintendo made the grandest gesture toward connecting core and casual at the show. Building off the Wii's casual crowd while enticing core gamers back into Nintendo's fold, the company announced their latest console, the **Wii U**. Launching in 2012, the system again revolves around a controller built to bring new gameplay experiences to both sets of gaming culture, but powered by a significantly upgraded console that, according to developers, runs "significantly more powerful" than Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3. The controller uses a classic joystick/analog stick/trigger setup built around a touchscreen display that can work as an input for game commands or stream gameplay from the console to the controller replacing the television. It also contains a camera and the accelerometer found in the Wii's remote, allowing for augmented reality, motion control, and evolved interaction familiar to the Wii faithful. With a host of third-party support, the Wii U is hoping to win back core gamers with a lineup of popular franchises, such as *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, *Tekken*, and *Darksiders 2*, that answer for the historical lack of core titles on the Wii. Adding in backwards compatibility with existing Wii titles keeps their established audience onboard alongside functionality that answers for core and casual demands. Details are still slim on price and a firm release, but Nintendo's efforts may unite casual and core gamers under a common console early next year.

E3 has long been the celebration of the core gamer. Franchises launch and revel in their success to adoring fans and buyers alike, while technology is held to high standards in both graphic fidelity and evolutionary game concepts. This has all been a holdover from when gaming was confined to the console scene, but the mainstream cultural integration of gaming into the everyday brings new and excited gamers to the mix, looking for different kinds of play that consoles haven't always been able to answer for. As the players evolve, so should the providers of play, and this year's E3 celebrated both the devotion of the core and the acceptance of the casual with technology and games that please both sides of the gaming party.



## CRASHING THE PARTY?

The Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) is described as the world's premier trade show for computer and console videogames. In living up to this specific description, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) has made significant strides (much to the dismay of general consumers) to ensure all attendees are officially associated with the games industry.

While this stricter attendee requirements trend has led to a decrease in the overall numbers on the show's floor, we are now conversely witnessing an increase in non-gaming industry participants on the exhibitor side. It seems the draw of the entire gaming industry's focus for those four days in Los Angeles has become of interest to non-endemic companies as well. Taking up space directly next to the big guns of the gaming world were companies such as T-Mobile, Sprint, Ford and Target, to name a few. Even before making our way into the hectic halls of the LA Convention Center, we found ourselves with the opportunity to play games, enter sweeps, participate in Guinness world records or just take a minute to get off of our feet courtesy of the likes of NOS Energy Drink and the Walmart Gamecenter Mobile Tour, presented by Axe.

Obviously the individuals included in the collection of core gaming constituents with unique influence among their peer sets have significant overlap with the target consumers of many brands. Engaging them amidst the sensory overload of E3, however, isn't as easy as simply being in the vicinity. We saw the 'outsiders' to the show reach varying levels of success based on strategic decisions and accompanying activations.

The one decision most companies have the least control over based on availability and affiliations is location. Those lucky enough to land one of the industry heavyweights as a neighbor guarantees foot traffic, while those sharing real estate with distant parking lots only guarantees less traffic returning to their hotels.

As all attendees know, the true value of attending E3 is getting hands-on time with the new content being demoed and highlighted throughout the booths. While there are, no doubt, times when we have to refuel our pizza and burger tanks, attendees are looking to fully leverage their time on the show floor taking in the upcoming awesomeness from the best in gaming. Any presence, branded or otherwise, that conflicts with these plans is not likely to receive much attention. To gaming fans and industry faithful, there will be countless other times to enter a sweepstakes or grab a quick product sample, but this is the only time you'll be able to get hands on with the new *Assassin's Creed* or see a live demo of *Bioshock Infinite* including developer Q&A.



FORD'S FIESTA GAMING LOUNGE

While we are on the topic of games, the use of current games as a carrot to drive engagement in an event setting usually works. But E3 may be the one exception since everyone is there to see and play games that aren't out and in some cases won't be out for another year. Attempting to compete for share of voice with available titles is a steep challenge that will likely end in less than satisfactory results.

Overall it was great to see the increased interest in connecting with E3 participants during the most exciting week of our year. Hopefully that interest will continue along with improved ways of engaging with us.



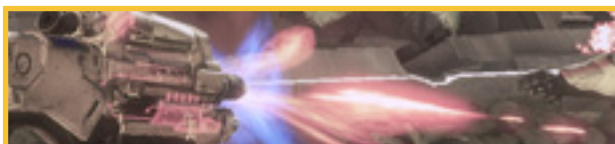
NOS' BOOTH at E3 2011

## SHOWING VS. TELLING



While E3 excites gamers for many reasons, one of its biggest draws has always been the opportunity to get hands-on experience with soon-to-be released games. Playing the next AAA title before the general public is not only fun, but it provides a social currency that can only be quantified in coolness points when bragging to friends. Compared to years past however, the opportunity to boast seemed far more limited. Rather than playable demos, many publishers chose to only show videos of their upcoming releases, taking more of a show & tell approach. Some of the most buzzed about games, such as *Mass Effect 3*, *Saints Row: The Third* and *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, were not available to play on the show floor. Activision took this approach to the extreme, offering attendees no playable demos and choosing instead to show videos of their upcoming slate of titles. So why did so many publishers choose to move their games off the show floor and into private screenings? The answer may have more to do with release dates than anything else.

While the 2011 holiday season will no doubt be an important time for the industry, it seems that more and more publishers are gearing up for the 2012 gaming year. Sony will launch a new portable handheld console to counter the 3DS, and Nintendo will unveil a new console all-together. Even some of Microsoft's biggest announcements, such as *Halo 4* and *Fable: The Journey*, won't be hitting shelves until after the New Year. So why all the focus on 2012? The reason may have something to do with the legend surrounding the event. E3 has long been billed as the go to spot for big, groundbreaking announcements. But with the access gamers now have to blogs, rumors, and developers themselves, very little 2011 news can be mentioned that the public already hasn't heard about. In order to make the splash that fans have come to expect, publishers are forced to focus on properties so far out in the development cycle that there is no way rumors could have "leaked." As a direct result of this, the show floor is being filled with more videos and less demos.



Another reason for the increase in trailers and decrease in hands-on access at E3 may be tied to the games being announced. Many new titles introduced evolutionary gameplay concepts that may not have transferred well to a showfloor demo. A game like *Tomb Raider*, long established in gamers' muscle memories for its puzzle/action gameplay, made the switch to a twitchier, reaction-based format mixed with lengthy puzzles. To put this game on the floor could lead to frustrated impressions based more around the expo's environment, where gamers have literally 5 minutes to absorb a demo before moving on. By controlling what they show and who shows it off, publishers can craft the message they want to share regarding their titles, showcasing the gameplay advancements rather than answering for the confusion a loud, busy showfloor can encourage.

E3 has come to be known as the go-to spot for big news in the videogame industry. But there are no surprises in this world. Nothing in the industry stays under wraps for long, forcing publishers to focus on IP so far out that no one could know about it. Are they a victim of the E3 hype? Possibly. But in order to remain relevant and satisfy the demands of their audience, focusing on properties more than a year out seems to be the best option. So this time next year, don't be surprised to find out that the most anticipated titles shown at E3 2012 won't be available to play until 2013.



ea's MASS EFFECT 3



## THE KIDS' GAMES ARE ALL RIGHT

The rise of non-traditional, intuitive controls in gaming has marked a renaissance for accessible games. Much of the focus for these games has been the "casual" market made up of teenage and adult audiences who find traditional controls too complicated. But there's an entirely different generation of gamers who are also gaining attention with these intuitive controls. With motion, voice, and touch control all coming into their own, game designers are starting to realize that young children are a viable audience as well. Games for children have always been around, but they've been dominated by license-driven or "edutainment" titles focused more on education or a quick cash-in. E3 2011 bucked that trend. Well-regarded game designers are developing high-quality, kid-focused projects with publishers putting forth time, effort, and energy creating and promoting these games.

A great example is *Once Upon A Monster*, created by renowned core developer Double Fine. The game uses Kinect technology to place kids in their own storybook version of Sesame Street where they take the role of a new Sesame Monster. And, unlike previous E3 shows, this family-focused game was sitting on the showfloor front and center as a showcase for controllerless gameplay and the potential for focus on a new audience. Microsoft also focused on two kid-friendly Kinect titles during their press conference. *Kinect Star Wars* and *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* allow kids of all ages to jump into their respective worlds and use their hands, arms, head, and feet to immerse themselves. The titles seem poised to appeal to young boys and girls this holiday season with their beautiful graphics, intuitive controls, and imaginative focus. Interestingly enough, these games were met with relative disdain by the general gaming audience, but when playing these games with a family in mind and a child's sense of fun, the appeal becomes immediate.



microsoft's KINECT DISNEYLAND ADVENTURES



double fine's ONCE UPON A MONSTER

Motion control wasn't the only kid-friendly control technology at the show. THQ unveiled the next generation of their *uDraw* hardware, a sort of tablet/pen combination that allows players to draw directly on their television screen with a stylus and touch screen. The *uDraw* has been a surprise success for the company; much of this attributed to the kid market. This is not to say that there aren't more traditional controlled games for children either. One only had to pass by the Disney Interactive booth to see a line-up of very kid-focused games, including the highly customizable *Disney Universe*. This represents a shift in strategy for Disney, as in recent years they've focused on creating games for core gamers.

After interacting with these kid experiences, it remains to be seen whether this push for higher quality, more immersive games for children will work. However, if you were under 10 years old, videogames had a fantastic showing at E3. The very definition of "toy" is evolving and videogames will be central to that. Growing up in the '10s certainly has its benefits.

## GAME OF THE SHOW?



If there was one standout title at this year's E3, it was Irrational Games' *Bioshock Infinite*. The follow-up to the critically and commercially acclaimed *Bioshock* swaps undersea objectivism for airborne American exceptionalism in the 1920's, putting you in the shoes of a man searching for a girl with special, time-bending abilities on a floating city named Columbia. From there, things get progressively more odd, but equally more awe-inspiring.

In the demo played through by the game developers, players will swoop through vertical gamespaces full of interactive elements that will both challenge FPS fans and advance the game's complex narrative. The attention to detail and story earned the title a number of "Best in Show" awards from gaming journalists industry-wide, as well as mainstream outlets like "Today" and the Associated Press.

Needless to say, we can't wait to see what the folks at Irrational have in store for us sometime next year.

Check out an interview with *Bioshock* creator **KEN LEVINE** at [GIANTBOMB.COM](http://GIANTBOMB.COM)

## TEST, PLAY, and LEARN



When Kinect released last year, hackers and programmers set to work trying to draw every ounce of creative potential from the motion tracking camera. Almost overnight, innovation came roaring forth via YouTube, with creative uses for Kinect popping up minute by minute. Whether it was using the camera to create lightsabers from cardboard tubes or virtual hand puppets that chattered and moved via motion control, gamers and non-gamers alike became excited by the possibilities.

At their E3 press conference, Microsoft put these hacks to good use, offering up a free downloadable collection of official versions of the best hacks in an evolving hub called *Kinect Fun Labs*. Currently, players can use their Kinect to make interactive bobbleheads, scan household items into a virtual world to play with, or create an avatar that dances and moves exactly as you would in front of the camera. Microsoft has promised more "toys" will be available in updates. By turning to the community for innovative uses of the technology they built, Microsoft not only encourages exploration of their tech, but unfettered interaction with whatever comes from these experiments.

Watch the **KINECT FUN LABS** trailer at [XBOX.COM](http://XBOX.COM)



WHAT WE CAN'T WAIT TO PLAY FROM E3  
**MASS EFFECT 3**



WHAT WE CAN'T WAIT TO PLAY FROM E3  
**BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY**



WHAT WE CAN'T WAIT TO PLAY FROM E3  
**ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM**

**PLAYED**  
CONTRIBUTORS - JUNE 2011

ERIC BEE  
CHRIS BLUMBERG  
STEPHANIE HUYNH  
JOHN RAFFERTY  
MATT STORY  
BENNY TORRES

A PUBLICATION OF THE DENUO GROUP • © 2011 Denuo Group. • All Rights Reserved