

GAMER'S PARADISE

Sony PS3

Sony spends \$30 mil. on new kiosk program that includes relaunch of PS2 and PSP



By Julia Steinberger

FOSTER CITY, CALIF. — A year after competitor Microsoft unleashed Xbox 360 with an award-winning retail kiosk program, and two days before Nintendo's Wii hit shelves, **Sony Computer Entertainment America** answered with PlayStation 3 (PS3). The new-generation, high-definition console launched nationwide and in Canada on Nov. 17, with a lineup of kiosks designed to unify the entire PlayStation family at retail and to eventually provide an in-store home for Sony's entire entertainment collection.

The PS3 interactive kiosks were designed to mirror the sleek silhouette of the console itself and tie into a new set of P-O-P, including interactives for previous gaming systems PlayStation 2 and PlayStation Portable (PSP). "With the launch of PlayStation products over the last 11 years, we've executed against each respective platform, but never collectively grouped the platforms and given them a unified look at retail, which is what we're trying to accomplish this holiday season," says Joby Hirschfeld, merchandising operations manager.

Sony's PS3 is a next generation gaming system, touting a new Blu-ray DVD drive, running games at 1080p, which is the highest resolution possible. It also has a new Cell Broadband Engine and a SIXAXIS wireless controller, to go along with other features such as online capability. More than 20 games launched along with the system in November.

A preawareness campaign began holding retail space in September for the kiosks, which began shipping the first week of November. Sony aimed to have all interactives installed

across North America by Thanksgiving. The collection, which allotted different-sized versions of each kiosk to allow for individual store needs, included 15,000 PS3 kiosks in five versions; 6,000 PSP kiosks in six versions; and 1,000 PS2 kiosks in two versions (about 18,000 PS2 kiosks are already in the marketplace, and some retailers chose to keep their previous version). Bloomberg reports that Sony spent \$30 million to launch the interactive displays, which will reach major chains including Best Buy, Circuit City, Sony Style, GameStop, Toys "R" Us, Target and Wal-Mart.

According to Hirschfeld, the unified kiosk family will help PS3 stand apart from Xbox. "I agree that Xbox did a good job with their launch, but I think that in relation to what we're trying to convey here and having the opportunity to reinvigorate PS2 and PSP at the same time, it's a different message for the PS3," says Hirschfeld. "Ultimately, we've been doing it longer; we know the marketplace better."

The PS3 kiosks mimic the soft curves of the PS3, with attention to detail down to holes punched in the kiosks to evoke the vents on the console. Designers chose silver for the kiosks to allow the black console to stand out, and heavy chrome accents on the kiosks mirror the chrome on the unit. The color TV screens atop the PlayStation kiosks were specially designed by Sony Electronics to match the P-O-P. When a few moments pass without a consumer touching the kiosk, the screen automatically reverts to video vignettes that educate about the product.

The kiosks also carry modular components to allow space to educate consumers about the product. Some of the interactives feature messaging behind the PS3 unit, and wing panels on some displays carry changeable slide-in graphics. "We can hang brochures on that wing, we can put product on it, it gives us more longevity, and we can work with retailers to create custom messaging packages, even retailer-specific messaging packages," he says. The wing components also allow the displays to fit in different-sized spaces: The largest PS3 kiosk is 36 inches wide by 24 inches deep by 80 inches tall; the smallest is the same depth and height, but much slimmer, with a width of 20 inches.

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The front of the kiosk conveys a united Sony image, with a Blu-ray logo embedded into the chrome just below the glass case holding the PS3 unit. The specially designed monitors have HDMI connectivity to showcase the hi-definition Blu-ray technology. The Sony entertainment theme will give the units versatility for promotions beyond PS3.

“Our ultimate goal is to take all the interactives that we have here, network them all online so we can better provide messaging and special events, and allow the retailer to draw consumers into their stores,” says Hirschfeld. “There’s a bunch of unique tie-ins that we can do with the retailer ... also, to open doors for Sony Pictures, they can have trailers on the kiosk or Sony Music. It becomes an entertainment kiosk Sony brand.”

More P-O-P will come later to flesh out the PlayStation section in stores.



(From left to right) A new PS2 kiosk, PSP endcap and special PSP display launched simultaneously with the new PS3 game console. All were part of a multimillion dollar campaign to unify the brand in-store.



“Our game plan is to come back in January and truly brand out the section at retail ... with black wallpaper, signage, new headers for the sections, deck magnets ... to show the cohesiveness of the PlayStation family of products,” says Hirschfeld. “To get it done before the Thanksgiving holiday was just too intense. Interactivity was the first call to action for us.”

Rapid Displays, Chicago and Union City, Calif., produced the kiosk program. Sony has contracted with several third-party merchandising companies for the North America installation. Sony’s team of 130 Sony-employed merchandisers will also help support the execution. PS3 launched in Japan on Nov. 11, and the European launch is scheduled for March 2007; each regional headquarters designed its own interactive in-store program. ■