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Xbox 360 Rolls Out Worldwide

Microsoft shelled out “unlimited” investment to blend consistency of look, customization of shape for its global launch

REDMOND, WASH. — One of the most anticipated new product launches of the year, **Microsoft Corp.** will launch Xbox 360 globally with a display rollout spanning three continents. With a cleaner look, and more features, Xbox will hit shelves across the U.S. on Nov. 22, in Europe on Dec. 2 and in Japan on Dec. 10, setting the table for the latest battle among the gaming platforms.

In an attempt to project a consistent message across such a broad variety of environments, the company worked with eight vendors to produce “hundreds and hundreds” of different pieces of P-O-P ranging from interactive kiosks and pallets to standees and posters, says Bill Brownell, director of Xbox channel marketing and Microsoft retail services.

With a more experienced team than Microsoft had on hand for the original Xbox, the company spent quite a bit more time meeting with retailers beforehand to talk about everything from space planning to generating excitement around the launch, says Parisa Zander, group manager for Microsoft visual merchandising.

“The goal of this team was to put one brand vision before consumers worldwide,” Brownell says. “There’s a lot of custom units; there’s also the generic units. Whatever we needed to do to make Xbox 360 successful, we did.”

“For almost all of our retailers, we customized at least one piece,” adds Danell Loftin, visual merchandising manager

for Xbox retail. “At the same time we’re trying to build that brand consistency.” According to Brownell, this meant compromising more on the shape of the units than on the overall style.

The global launch with myriad pieces required an “unlimited” investment, he says, adding: “I won’t quote the budget. I’ll just say that we’re making a significant investment to make retailers successful and make Microsoft successful.”

The company tried to keep the budget in line with the competition, adds Jake Jacobsen, senior retail display manager. Among other steps, the company used common parts to produce a kiosk program for about 20 countries, which “saved a ton of money,” he says. “The first time, we had a lot of different countries doing their own thing.”

Microsoft is currently a step ahead of its competitors, Sony and Nintendo, who will launch their own next-generation consoles in 2006. Microsoft does not intend to cede the floor to PlayStation 3 in coming months, says Denise Cuvillier, lead visual merchandising manager. “One thing that we’re going to make sure to do when PlayStation 3 comes out, we want to make sure that we still have presence in the retailers,” she says. “Our goal was to make sure we did make a big statement, to make sure we enhanced our brand identity.”



Microsoft's campaign for Xbox 360, which includes numerous pieces such as this sign, kiosk and glorifier, will feature a more open and inviting look than the original Xbox merchandising, aimed at attracting more casual gamers.

The launch campaign focuses on the updated look of the new console, which marketers hope will expand its appeal to a broader range of consumers. The original Xbox, says Brownell, “was dark, it was big, and it was for the hard-core [gamer] ... The new one is light, it’s inviting, and it’s for everyone.”

“This time around,” says Zander, “we wanted something that was much more open, much more organic. We took that all the way from the branding down to what the interactive looked like. ... We would never get rid of the Xbox green; we’ve just evolved the brand more.”

Interactive kiosks, the centerpiece of the campaign, will feature bonus download content, featuring high-definition television for a crisper look and headset jacks so consumers can still hear audio if in-store personnel lower the volume. “It’s more than just playing games. It’s about learning about the system,” Brownell says.

There are three different varieties of kiosks: A high-end display designed to be permanent that contains “everything you’d

want” including a memory unit; a middle option designed to be up for one to six months that’s smaller and less enclosed; and an “economy” style kiosk that’s less interactive and is “made for locations that just want to affix a console near a TV set,” he says.

Other P-O-P pieces include a metal counter-unit product glorifier that provides “why to buy” information; semipermanent pallet displays for mass stores that are constructed out of metal and corrugated; lighted signage designed for mall-based accounts; and a variety of custom displays for “significant” retailers, Brownell says.

Along with the technical improvements of Xbox 360, the in-store pieces will highlight a “family” setting that allows consum-

ers to limit certain content, Cuvillier says. “The console can allow parents to control the type of content their children can see,” she says.

After kicking off the awareness campaign with a special on MTV, Microsoft installed “iconic” in-store pieces in October, Loftin says. “Then, we’re giving you the whole kitchen sink come November.”

The vendors that produced the displays include: **DCI Marketing**, Milwaukee; **Design Phase**, Waukegan, Ill.; **Frank Mayer & Assoc.**, Grafton, Wis.; **Harbor Industries**, Grand Haven, Mich.; **Imagi-Corps**, Redmond, Wash.; **Leatherback**, Kirkland, Wash.; **Rapid Displays**, Chicago and Union City, Calif.; and **Ten Gun**, Seattle. ■



The global launch of Microsoft's Xbox 360 centers on interactive kiosks and plenty of account-tailored P-O-P to flaunt the brighter, updated style of the new console.