

SCI|TECH

THE BATTALION

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Gaming on the go: handhelds shake up market

By George Deutsch
THE BATTALION

For the first time since the days of the Sega Game Gear in the mid-1990s, Nintendo has some competition in the handheld video game system market. Two companies are set to unveil their portable gaming systems this month — Nokia is debuting its N-Gage and Tapwave its Zodiac — and another, Playstation, has announced many of the specifications for its new portable, the PSP, set to debut next year.

Before running out and dropping \$300 on a new 32-bit piece of handheld hardware, gamers should be aware of what they are getting — and in some cases, not getting — for their gaming dollar. The increased competition in the market should, in theory, drive prices down and game quality up, but that remains to be seen.

It would be difficult, but not impossible, for Nintendo to lose its grip on the handheld market, which it has dominated since 1989 with the original Game Boy. For the past several years, Nintendo has had the only handheld system on the market for which games were still being produced.

The GBA SP, Nintendo's latest in the popular line of Game Boys, currently supports hundreds of games. It is reverse compatible, allowing gamers to play old Game Boy Color and original Game Boy games on it, as well as GBA games. This gives a huge advantage to Nintendo, as it already has an established library of games.

The GBA also underwent a facelift, and it now features a sleeker, slimmer look in the form of the GBA SP. Arguably its biggest advantage, though, is that it has a suggested retail price of \$99.99, a far cry from the \$300 cost of other systems. The GBA is also compatible with the Nintendo GameCube, and it features in-CPU memory capabilities, meaning it can save games without an additional memory unit.

The GBA, however, will have to compete with superior hardware and software, not to mention the other features its competition has, such as cell phones and PDAs. For many GBA owners, the novelty might also have worn off, as it has been on the market for more than a year.

First in line to dethrone Nintendo is Nokia and its N-Gage. The N-Gage's biggest selling point is that it also functions as a cell phone and MP3 player. It will retail for \$299, and will support many popular titles for its launch, such as Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4, Tomb Raider

and Red Faction II. It will also offer a USB connection and memory card compatibility.

Unfortunately, some may find game loading to be a chore. Players must shut down the N-Gage system and take out the battery to change games, and when used as a phone, the N-Gage can make you look like you're "talking on a taco," according to Game Informer Magazine. Still, with Nokia's hardware capabilities and name recognition, the N-Gage looks formidable.

Next in line is Tapwave's Zodiac, which features a back-lit LCD screen, analog control stick and rumble effects, according to www.tapwave.com. The Zodiac's biggest lure is that it also functions as a PDA and MP3 player. It features a touch-sensitive display screen. The Zodiac will also be able to play movies, and it features its own graphing calculator. It will sell for \$299, and it has memory card compatibility.

Tapwave's Zodiac, however, has the unenviable task of trying to develop name recognition from scratch in a market where name recognition is everything. With limited launch titles, the Zodiac has to set itself apart from the competition by developing a fan base and proving it doesn't need a cell phone to stay competitive.

Last is Sony's PSP, which will not debut until 2004. Sony is promising gamers that the PSP isn't "old technology squished into a handheld, like the GBA" in its trade magazine, the Official U.S. Playstation Magazine.

The PSP will play games and movies, and it will also support surround sound, according to www.playstation.com. It will offer wireless LAN support, allowing gamers to compete with each other wirelessly. Sony has said that to remain competitive, it will sell the PSP for less than \$250.

The PSP's biggest challenge will be to remain competitive even though it is being released a year later than its competition. This year of downtime will give the GBA, N-Gage and Zodiac more time to develop games and a fan base. Only time will tell whether Sony can usurp this.

The handheld video game market is definitely being shaken up. Gamers should ignore the hype and expensive ad campaigns and buy the system that best meets their gaming needs.

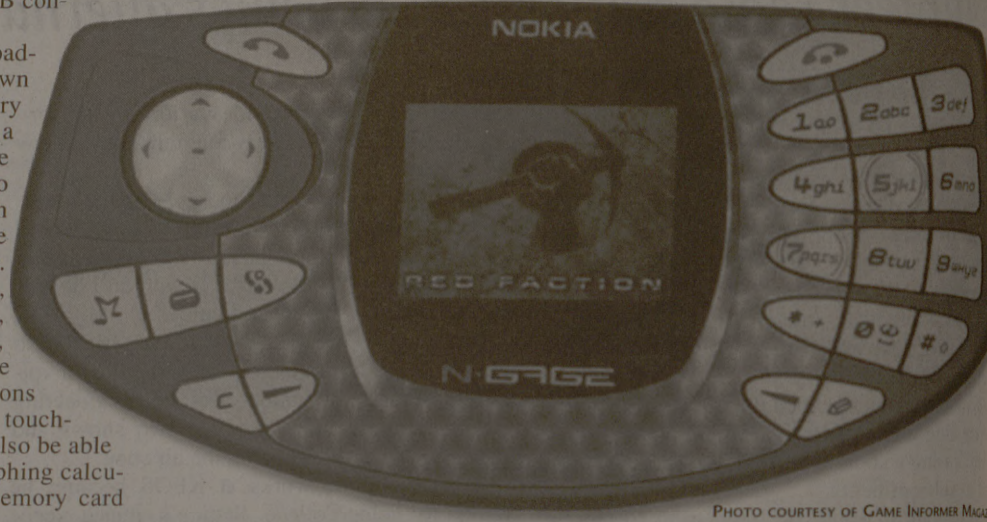


PHOTO COURTESY OF GAME INFORMER MAGAZINE

The Nokia N-Gage (top) will function as a portable game player, cell phone and MP3 player. It will retail for \$299, and it will feature games such as Tomb Raider and Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAME INFORMER MAGAZINE

Not only does the Tapwave Zodiac (above) play games, it also works as a PDA and MP3 player. It can also play movies, and it has a touch-sensitive screen and a graphing calculator.

How does your religion view organ donation?

ASSEMBLY OF GOD	Donation is highly supported by the denomination. The decision to donate is left to the individual.
BAPTIST	Organ donation is encouraged as an act of stewardship and of compassion for those who are suffering.
BUDDHIST	Donation is a matter of individual conscience. A high value is placed on acts of compassion.
CATHOLIC	Organ and tissue donation is an act of charity and love. Pope John Paul II has stated that Christians should accept this as a challenge to their generosity and fraternal love.
CHRISTIAN SCIENTIST	The decision to donate is left to the individual.
EPISCOPAL	A resolution in 1982 recognizes the life-giving benefits of donation. All Christians are encouraged to become donors "as part of their ministry to others in the name of Christ, who gave His life that we may have life in its fullness."
HINDU	The decision to donate is left to the individual. Organ transplantation can be used to alleviate the suffering of other human beings.
INDEPENDENT EVANGELICAL	The decision to donate is left to the individual. Nothing in Scripture contradicts organ donation.
ISLAM	Muslim scholars belonging to various schools of Islamic law have cited the principle of the priority on saving human life and have permitted organ donation and transplantation as a necessity to procure that noble end.
JUDAISM (ALL BRANCHES)	Organ donation is a contemporary Mitzvah. When a human life can be saved, it must be saved.
LUTHERAN	Donation contributes to the well being of humanity and can be "an expression of sacrificial love for a neighbor in need."
METHODIST	The United Methodist Church encourages all Christians to become organ donors as part of their ministry to others in the name of Christ.
PRESBYTERIAN	Members are encouraged to be organ donors.

Organ Donor Card



I, _____, have spoken to my family about organ and tissue donation. I wish to donate the following:

Any needed organs and tissue
 Only the following organs and tissue: _____

Date: _____

The following individuals have witnessed my commitment to being a donor:

www.donorworld.com
1.800.355.7427

www.organ.org
1.800.788.8058

GET THE FACTS
SIGN A CARD
TELL YOUR FAMILY
SAVE LIVES

Talk to your spiritual leader about organ donation. Then, talk to your family about your decision to donate.

Come talk to us at the MSC or Blocker Building on October 14th from 9am-3pm.