

Upcoming Consoles

A comparison, by Jeff Merchant

You've heard the scuttlebutt about all the amazing console systems on the horizon. Sure, there's a lot of hoopla, but remember that the console you invest in is an important decision, not to be based on myth and misinformation. Which of these contenders should a family choose to replace their PlayStation, N64, or Dreamcast? We took a look at Sony's Playstation 2, Nintendo's GameCube and Microsoft's Xbox, and here's what we found.

The Key Players

First a farewell to Sega's Dreamcast—This next generation of consoles marks the end of one company's reign, as well as brings a new player into the mix. Sega, videogame veteran, lost most of its market share to the Sony Playstation and Nintendo 64. It had one last chance to redeem itself with the Dreamcast, but things didn't pan out, and now the company is sticking to software. As one leaves, however, another quickly steps in to fill the void.

The Xbox (SRP \$300)— Making its console debut this fall is Microsoft (no introduction necessary) with its PC-based Xbox.

GameCube (SRP \$200)—Coming November 5, (around the same time that the Xbox comes out), Nintendo will be releasing the highly anticipated GameCube. Nintendo was the industry leader for a solid decade beginning in the middle eighties and reaching well into the nineties.

Playstation 2 (sells for about \$300)— Sony's latest achievement, the PS2, was released late last year to a flurry of praise and attention. The system sold over a million units at launch and has continued strong sales and a dedicated following thanks to great technology and a steady stream of games. Sony should prove a good corporate rival for the PC monolith Microsoft.

The Technology

There is no comparison between this generation of consoles and the previous (Playstation, N64). The quality of graphics, sound and overall game play has improved so much that regardless of which system you buy, you'll be very impressed. It should be mentioned that the Dreamcast, although no longer being produced but still available, is much more closely aligned with the new than the old. That said, each system differs in the computing horsepower that's under its respective hood.

- The PS2 sports a 294 MHz CPU, 147 MHz graphics chip and a total of 36 MB RAM.
- The GameCube is powered by a 485 MHz CPU, 162 MHz graphics chip, and 40 MB total RAM.
- The Xbox has the raw power advantage, with a 733 MHz processor, 250 MHz graphics chip and 64 MB RAM.

The Game Format

All three systems will use some type of CD, but only the Xbox and PS2 will support the playback of DVD movies. The Xbox ships with a hard drive although one is available for the PS2. Only the PS2 is backward compatible, in other words, you can play older PSX games.

The Controllers

Each have similar two-handle controllers, which vary slightly in the layout of buttons and size.



Nintendo's GameCube controller is smaller and easier to use than the PlayStation 2 or the Xbox. We like it.

- Sony's PS2 still uses its intuitive DualShock Analog controller, which many feel is the best out there. The console can support two controllers.
- The Xbox controller has a little more bulk to it, making it comfortable for older gamers with bigger hands. Up to four controllers can plug into the console.
- The GameCube's controller is the most kid-friendly. It's smaller than the Xbox and the former N64 controller, bigger than the PS2 and significantly improved over the N64. Four players can plug into the console, either with the typical game controller or a Game Boy Advance.

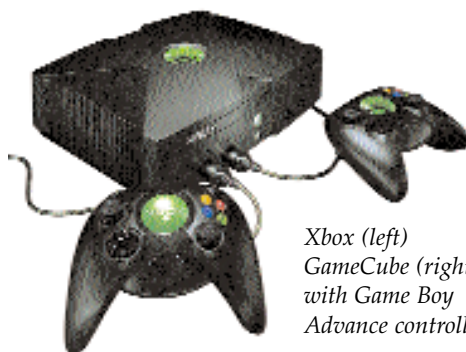
The Games

The games make all the difference in the console. The PS2 has a year head-start on the other two, so this battle may be weighted in its favor. At its release, there were a total of 26 games available, with a steady stream of titles being produced. By the time November rolls around and the other two are available, there will be hundreds of PS2 titles to pick from. Sony also has the advantage of backward compatibility, meaning the 1000 or so titles developed for the Playstation can also play on the PS2.

Nintendo's GameCube will debut with only seven titles, all of which were developed by the company itself. Although this may seem like precious few, there are numerous titles in devel-



The PlayStation 2



*Xbox (left)
GameCube (right)
with Game Boy
Advance controllers*



opment by Nintendo and other companies, all due in time for the holiday season. Nintendo also has the corner on familiar licenses like Mario and Pokémon.

The Xbox is expected to launch with a dozen or so titles, geared toward teen and adult gamers. It's not yet clear how much 3rd party developers have embraced the Xbox, although Microsoft does have one advantage over the others. The PC-based architecture means that developers of PC games will have an easy transition into the world of Xbox.

Our Final Answer?

The PS2 is a sure bet, with its PSX heritage (and games!), vast industry support and overall high quality. We also know that Nintendo isn't about to let Sony take over, so get ready for an excellent GameCube. You can always count on Nintendo to deliver outstanding systems and games. And that brings us to the Xbox. Of the three, this has the greatest potential to be an amazing, pivotal console. Unfortunately, it's also Microsoft's first shot at gaming, so we don't have the overwhelming confidence that we do with the other two.

Our recommendation—hold out until mid-November, when both the Xbox and GameCube hit the scene. Then try out each at a retail outlet, and consider the available software. You'll be in much better position to choose the system that best suits your needs. ☺

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