PSP Launch Exclusive for Gameworld Industries

The Muscleman of Technology "Hands-on" with the PSP   *March, 2005*

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I graciously accepted an invitation from Paul Murphy of Sony Computer Entertainment, San Diego to get a little hands-on action with the PlayStation Portable (PSP) on 3/23 (a day before the North American launch on 3/24/05). Paul is the Public Relations Specialist for Sony's San Diego Sports Division (989 Sports). Paul showed me the ropes concerning the PSP and offered me an insider's look at the PSP in action. I was so impressed with my PSP sit down with Paul, I went down to my local Wal-Mart at 7am 3/24 and picked up my very own PSP! This hands-on assessment is more about the PSP system functionality, and less about the games (detailed reviews for PSP games will be covered by Gameworld staff very shortly).

Value Packs
First, we need to clear up any confusion about what comes with the PSP's suggested MSRP of $249 in North America (prices can vary depending on retailers and seller bundles). The first million launch units are designated "Value Packs" which contain a 32MB Memory Stick Duo (Sony's memory card format for the PSP), headphones with in-line remote control unit, battery pack, A/C adaptor, soft traveling case, and special cleaning cloth. But that's not all…you also get a UMD Sampler Disc (more on the UMD below) containing music videos, non-interactive game demos, and movie trailers. But the "piece de résistance" is a special UMD disc containing the full length Spider-Man 2 movie from none other than…Sony Entertainment. Keep in mind the Value Packs with the Spidy movie are only going to the first million units—which is the total launch quantity here. Just for trivia, there will be 3 million units available worldwide by 3/31/05.

Launch Line Up
24 launch titles will be immediately available—eight 1st party games from Sony, and 16 from 3rd party game developers. I asked Paul what his favorite game was and why. "I really like World Tour Soccer, it's easy to pick up and play but difficult to master." We played with Wipeout Pure, NBA, MLB, and World Tour Soccer. All I can say is the visuals are truly stunning and crisp! Each game exhibited brilliant colors, immersive audio depth, and razor sharp in-game text. Other detailed effects were down right impressive not to mention the stellar game control. No doubt, this is definitely an extraordinary list of launch titles. In fact, 24 launch titles will go down as one of the best debuts of any game platform…handheld or otherwise! Another little known fact is that many PSP sports titles (NBA, MLB, World Tour Soccer, and Gretzky NHL) are designed

and developed here at 989 Sports in San Diego—if I can just get my hardwoods at home to look as good as those in the NBA game.

Universal Media Disc
Here is everything you ever wanted to know about Sony's new UMD high capacity optical disc. Max capacity is 1.8GB (single-sided, dual layer). Size is 60mm in diameter (just over 2 ¼ inches). Copyright protection system combines a unique disc ID plus 128-bit AES encryption keys. One last thing—don't worry about inserting your UMD the wrong way—it can only fit one way…the correct way! The PSP will instantly recognize the type of UMD you install, such as movie or game, and display its content on screen.

PSP Control Scheme
There are two main media interface bars which control the PSP. The Vertical Media Bar, and Cross Media Bar (which some refer to as the "XMB"). For accessing specific media applications, use the Cross Media Bar (photo, music, video, or game icons). For setting up your PSP's personal preferences (power settings, clock, sound, time, date, etc.) you will use the Vertical Media Bar. The Analog Stick is quite responsive and from the games I played is quite easy to adapt with just the right amount of tactile feel. The shoulder buttons (L1 & R1) are easy to access from the standard grip of the unit.

Multiplayer Modes
Paul explained to me the two modes of multiplayer gaming. The first is called *Ad hoc* mode (max of up to 16 PSP's at about 100ft range) which is WiFi locally within a region such as your office. The second mode is called *Infrastructure* mode which is truly "On-line mode," going through a wireless router which takes you to the infrastructure network very similar to playing a regular PS2 game on-line. Each game title with "Infrastructure Mode" capability will have its own server and game lobby (no subscription charges or fees).

Tune Time
Listening to music and sound on the PSP with the included headphones is very, very good. Listening to music and sound on the PSP without headphones is well…not great. It's nice to see the on-screen volume indicators when adjusting sound to give you a reference point to your audio level. To understand more in-depth about the whole screen set-up for music and MP3 capability, I would strongly suggest glancing through pages 58 to 62 of the manual.

Download This
This brings us to the next big test which everyone wants to know. How easy is it to transfer JPEG photos and MP3 songs from your computer to your PSP? It worked flawlessly for me on my first attempt. Keep these tips in mind. First, remember to format your 32MB Memory Stick Duo memory card prior to connecting to your computer. Next go to the Vertical Media Bar and select USB Connection. The "PSP" folder will now appear on your computer with 4 automatically populated folders inside: Music, Photo, Game, and SaveData. Yes, it's drag and drop for your MP3s and JPEGs. A piece of cake—and the option for manipulating your pics and tunes are quite good on the PSP. I will tackle MPEG4 conversion and transfers at another time.

Things You Should Know About the PSP
There are 4 incremental levels of screen brightness settings you can toggle through using the front Display button. However the 4th level of brightness is only available when the unit is running on A/C power!

According to the manual it takes 2 hours and 20 minutes to fully charge the battery. But running time is impossible to quantify due to various personal preferences/settings such as display, volume, game choices, movie characteristics, and battery aging over time. In my estimation, you should be safe for 4-5 hours the first few months.

When connecting to your PC, the PSP is recognized as a "Mass Storage Device" and this means you should probably dismount it properly before yanking out the USB cable. For XP users this means double-clicking on the "Safely Remove Hardware" icon in your lower right system tray area.

Don't freak out when you first glance at the 390 page manual; only the first 126 pages are in English—does a device like this really need 126 pages? Most folks will be off and running just by glancing through the 4 pages of the blue covered PSP Quick Reference guide (included in the box).

Per page 118 of the PSP manual: "Because battery power is used even when the system is turned off, it is recommended that you charge the battery frequently." Real world translation: if you're not playing in the next few days, remove the battery or you will be spending more time charging than playing (unless you want to be tethered by the A/C cord).

The Sony Memory Stick Duo will read the following file formats: MP3, JPEG, MPEG4, PCM, & ATRAC3plus.

You can get detailed exact battery status under "System Settings: Battery Information."

You can get your unique network MAC address as well and System Software version under "System Settings: System Information."

What Needs Improvement
When you click the front "Display button" the screen should show an indicator that briefly tells you the brightness setting you're on, similar to the volume ticks for sound. The display does look a bit washed out when outside, but I realize this is subjective. Rumors are PSP UMD movies will be $20.00. That might be hard to justify as DVD's with extra content can be had at almost half the price. How many times will you watch the same movie? I love the elegant black finish of the PSP, but fingerprint and other smudges show everywhere and quickly. Don't commit a crime and leave your PSP around…busted! This is by far the best convergence device to date and I know I'm nit picking, but I want to shove my PSP in my pocket right along side my Casio EX-S100 credit card camera! The PSP is a tad too big and heavy to accomplish this (but definitely portable enough to take with you).

Let me conclude by saying I love my PSP and I'm working on a mod right now to turn it into a CDMA phone—go ahead and laugh, but I will be looking pretty fly holding my PSP up to my ear while flexing my right bicep!