

Microsoft to release 3rd version of 'Halo' on Sept. 25

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Microsoft has announced that the third installment of "Halo," its biggest video game franchise, will be released on Sept. 25.

For Microsoft, which made the announcement on Tuesday, the "Halo" franchise has been one of the company's most formidable weapons as it continues pushing into the video game business, taking on established Japanese game giants like Sony and Nintendo.

Since the original "Halo" was introduced in 2001, the series has sold more than 14 million copies. In November 2004, "Halo 2" generated more than \$100 million in sales in 24 hours.

Set in a science fiction environment, "Halo" became wildly popular because it was one of the first games to successfully use the first-person shooter technique on a console plugged into a television rather than on a personal computer.

Until "Halo," a mouse and keyboard were generally thought necessary to provide an engaging first-person experience. Halo demonstrated that the small joysticks on a console controller could also deliver first-person action.

The first "Halo" was essential in building the credibility of Microsoft's original Xbox game machine.

Now Microsoft is trying to fend off the latest contender from Sony, the PlayStation 3, with its Xbox 360. Microsoft is hoping that "Halo 3," which will not be playable on the Sony console, will increase the Xbox 360's momentum in the market.

In a draft version of the announcement, Peter Moore, corporate vice president of Microsoft's interactive entertainment division, called the release of "Halo 3" "more than a video game release; it's the biggest entertainment event of the year."

Microsoft is already starting to build publicity for the game.

This week, online players are getting their first peek at the game in the form of a test, or beta, version that Microsoft is distributing over its Xbox Live Internet service.

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