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LATEST ENTRY SETS BENCHMARK FOR MAKERS

Game industry does 360

BY TERESA LATCHFORD
Staff Writer

Generations gaps closed in the lineup that snaked around the Government nightclub last night.

Gamers from the Pong era to those pining for Joanna Dark came together and recognized each other simply as fellow gamers — and people willing to line up outside in the cold for a chance to try the new Xbox 360.

Chris Pang, 24, and his friend had been taking shifts in line since 9 a.m. "I even called in sick to be here," he said.

Wearing a heavy winter jacket, toque and mittens while snacking on a sandwich, Mr. Pang stood through the weather, which was no match for his interest in checking out the latest game console.

The Xbox 360 packs a powerful punch

of technology into a small unit, including a 20-gigabyte detachable hard drive, wireless controllers and remote control. The total bundle will leave your pocket \$499 lighter, though there is a stripped down version available for \$100 less.

Some said they just had to have it while others, such as Matt Capramos, were planning to wait.

"The price will go down in about a year so I'm thinking I'll get one Christmas 2006," he said.

Once the doors opened, the gamers found themselves lining up again, either for a chance to buy one of 200 systems available before the actual release at midnight or to try out one of the demo models.

Fog crept down from the ceiling, green lights twisted and turned on the walls, a disco ball spun and music pumped in sync with gamers' hearts as they picked up the sleek, white controllers and launched games that hadn't yet hit store shelves.

Each island held two to three high-definition flat screen televisions displaying the action. Players laughed and taunted each other, constantly surrounded by a crowd of onlookers awaiting their turns.

All-in-all, most of the buzz among gamers about the graphics and handling was positive.

The graphics were impressive.

In *Need for Speed 2*, the gravel on the road could be seen clearly. The glare from the road when it was slick and the way the sun gleamed off the cars made the experience even more realistic. The controller rumbled when gamers travelled over rough road or shoulders, giving it a more interactive feel. However, the controls are extremely touchy, which could be good for a hard-core gamer but could make the cars too hard to handle for the average player.

The dual sticks on the easy-to-hold controllers came in handy while competing online with multiple players in the first-person shooter *Perfect Dark Zero*. The levels were large but the attention to detail was no more than for similar games on other consoles, such as *Time Splitters* for the PlayStation 2.

There was little slowdown, even with 16 players competing; the play was very smooth and load time wasn't a factor.

The state-of-the-art technology was not utilized in every game. Many of the sports games looked flat and lacked some detail. The only bonus with *NHL 2K6* is the short loading time.

Like the Playstation and the original Xbox, the 360 doubles as a DVD player but it will also play burned discs and MP3s. You can even connect your MP3 player and stream your own soundtrack while you play your favourite game.

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