Shake-Up Timing in the Gaming Industry

Description: The worldwide game industry is expected to post revenues of $57 billion in 2009, but Western game publishers are finding it increasingly difficult to make a profit. A DFC Intelligence report shows that even though seven select Western publishers had an average increase in revenue of 50% over the past two years, they had an aggregate net loss, with the loss increasing 42% in 2008. These publishers are finding profitability extremely difficult due to a dysfunctional game market, and they face a wide range of problems, including skyrocketing development costs, platform fragmentation, piracy, used-game sales, and lengthy console transitions.

Recent innovations promise to enable “gaming the cloud” and can offer new, less fragmented and more effective markets that may pave the way to a profitable future for these publishers.

One very promising new service made a debut at this year’s Game Developers Conference. The OnLive2 gaming service promises to disrupt the status quo in the current game market by allowing games to be played instantly on a TV, PC or Mac with a broadband connection. The games are run, including the 3D graphics processing, on OnLive servers, with player commands coming into the servers and compressed video streaming into the home. No game processing takes place on the player’s PC, which just sends out commands and streams video from OnLive servers. This allows low-end PCs to play even the most resource-intensive games, and with a low-priced, or possibly free, OnLive MicroConsole, any TV can be used to play these games. The MicroConsole is basically a small box (about the size of a deck of cards) that sends player commands to the Internet and decompresses incoming video and sends it to the TV. Specific pricing was not given, but the plan is to have customers pay a fixed monthly payment to access the service, with additional charges to buy or rent specific games.

OnLive has the potential to be transformational in many ways. Since powerful hardware is needed only on the servers and not on the thin clients, many old PCs and PCs without powerful 3D graphics cards will be transformed into gaming-capable PCs. Macs, which have never really supported gaming, will become gaming computers, and consoles, including Xbox 360 and Playstation 3, will not be required to play games on the TV. Not only will OnLive significantly increase the installed base of game-capable PCs and TVs, but it also will offer a solution to many of the problems currently facing the gaming industry.

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