

Sony confuses its customers with product fragmentation

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So E3 is here again, along with a flurry of consumer news, games and future predictions on the trends of technology, or at least where the big entertainment companies would like us to think it's going anyway. This is our (the consumers) big window into their (the mega corp entertainment company) plans and products that we are all too excited about buying up for the next year.

Sony released big news about new games, old games being redone in HD, new devices and new online services. The key take home message for me was all about Sony Saturation. I can't quite decide if their Vision is saturate the market in devices that all do the same thing, or whether they just don't have a Vision at all, which has led to product development, where all their devices can do the same thing. Either way what we consumers are looking at is a dizzying array of Sony hardware and software services, much of which does exactly the same as its counterparts.

Sony already have Smart TVs, many of which are getting the ability to play older PlayStation titles. Now we are also hearing about the PlayStation TV, a set top box (\$99,USA only at the moment) Which seems to be able to stream PS4 content to another TV (Sony MagicEye anyone?) Then of course you've got the PS4, which cannot play older titles, only high end new ones. On top of that there are numerous rollouts of PS Now and Sony store implementations across PS VITA and Smart TVs. What's PS Now? Well it looks like a cloud based service you access through your TV allowing you access to older games and movies, oh, and you don't need a console, all the grunt work is done at a Sony server somewhere in a datacentre.

So what's the problem with having several different types of device doing the same thing? Well for both Sony and its consumers it brings a couple of interesting pitfalls, both of a technical nature and of a customer nature.

1. The product offering is confusing. As a consumer how do I select products with overlapping capabilities? Do I want a console, or a TV I can use to play similar games?

2. How do I manage my games collection? Are there custom versions of the Sony store per device to stop my buying the wrong product on the wrong device? Account management will become a much more intelligent process.

3. What impact does all this have on existing devices? How difficult are these things becoming to use? All these additional layers of software can't impede the customers too much, otherwise no-one will participate.

4. How does Sony keep them all up-to-date? TVs are notoriously bad at being updated, the big TV manufacturers would rather you buy a new TV every year than produce an upgrade roadmap for you. With more devices come more development, more testing and more releases. None of this comes cheap.

So for now, I'll wait and see how each of these pans out, but it does feel a little like Sony are rather randomly shooting at fish in a lake and seeing which one they hit first.

For further reading you can check out the BBC's article on E3 opening presentations here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-27774813>