

Opinion **360**



The short shorts said it all

Microsoft gets obsessive over Japan.

NOT CONTENT TO wait until Japanese gamers stepped foot into the Tokyo Game Show this year, Microsoft put hot-pants wearing booth babes inside the train station near the show to make sure that the first game-related freebie the hordes got had a green 360 on it.

Yes, Microsoft wants to win in Japan that much, and judging by the steady increase in 360 love there, they look like they stand a chance at something other than third place this time around.

Surveys conducted earlier in the year first had a pitiful 2 percent of Japanese consumers showing any interest in landing Microsoft's sleek white console.

That number jumped to a whopping six percent

months later. But after the big show in Japan where the 360 booth was the hottest thing on the floor, interest finally hit the double digits with 22 percent saying they might plunk down the wad of yen needed to game Microsoft style.

The show helped, but the real reason gamers in Japan are suddenly taking notice is because Microsoft has finally got its act together. While the company was getting its ass handed to it in Japan for five years, it took a lot of notes. And they didn't stop with lessons from the school of economic hard knocks. A Microsoft rep recently told me that the company also dumped a ton of cash into consumer research in Japan and did a lot of one-on-ones with game developers there.

All of that money and half a decade's worth

Brian Crecente Speaks...

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of painfully low Xbox sales in Japan convinced Microsoft that you need three things to make it in the island nation: A sleek console, around-the-clock-hands-on-in-your-face marketing, and plenty of games. Microsoft is so far managing to slam dunk all three key points, unveiling a smaller, sleeker console, convincing more than 35 Japanese publishers to jump on the Xbox 360 bandwagon and pulling fun little marketing stunts like the train station booth babes.

It was really at the Tokyo Game Show that things seemed to all come together for Microsoft. *Kameo* is a prime example. Despite the fact that launch title, *Perfect Dark Zero* is being pushed as the next *Halo* here in the U.S. and Europe, you didn't hear a peep about it at the show. Instead Microsoft pushed bizarre, anime-ish, Japanese-friendly *Kameo: Elements of Power* as the next big thing, and the crowds ate it up.

Yoshihiro Maruyama, Microsoft's crown prince of Japan, also unveiled a brilliant new marketing ploy by the behemoth. The Xbox 360 Lounge, a nearly half a million dollar building in a trendy part of Tokyo, will give gamers a chance to get their hands on the console and play around with some games, something that should go far to win the hearts and minds of gamers there.

It looks like Microsoft finally gets it, but what I don't get is why it is so obsessed about being number one in Japan? Sony may be number one there, but that doesn't account for its global success. Less than a third of the more than 90 million PS2s sold worldwide were purchased in Japan. (North America and Europe nearly tied for most of the remaining sales.)

I don't think this is really about paving the way toward global game dominance, what this really boils down to is that Microsoft wants some old-fashioned street cred. Despite all of its money and all its successes, deep down Microsoft craves a little gamer-love and acceptance.

The Xbox kind of reminds me of that nerdy kid we all knew in high school who may have had all of his shit together and probably was going to be someone when he hit the real world, but just didn't fit in. Microsoft hope that getting Japan to like the 360 will somehow make up for a lifetime of missed prom dates, atomic wedgies and stolen lunch money.

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