

Choosing The *RIGHT* Video Game Console This Holiday Season

Make Sense Of
The Most
Popular
Video Game
Consoles And
Give The
Perfect Gift!



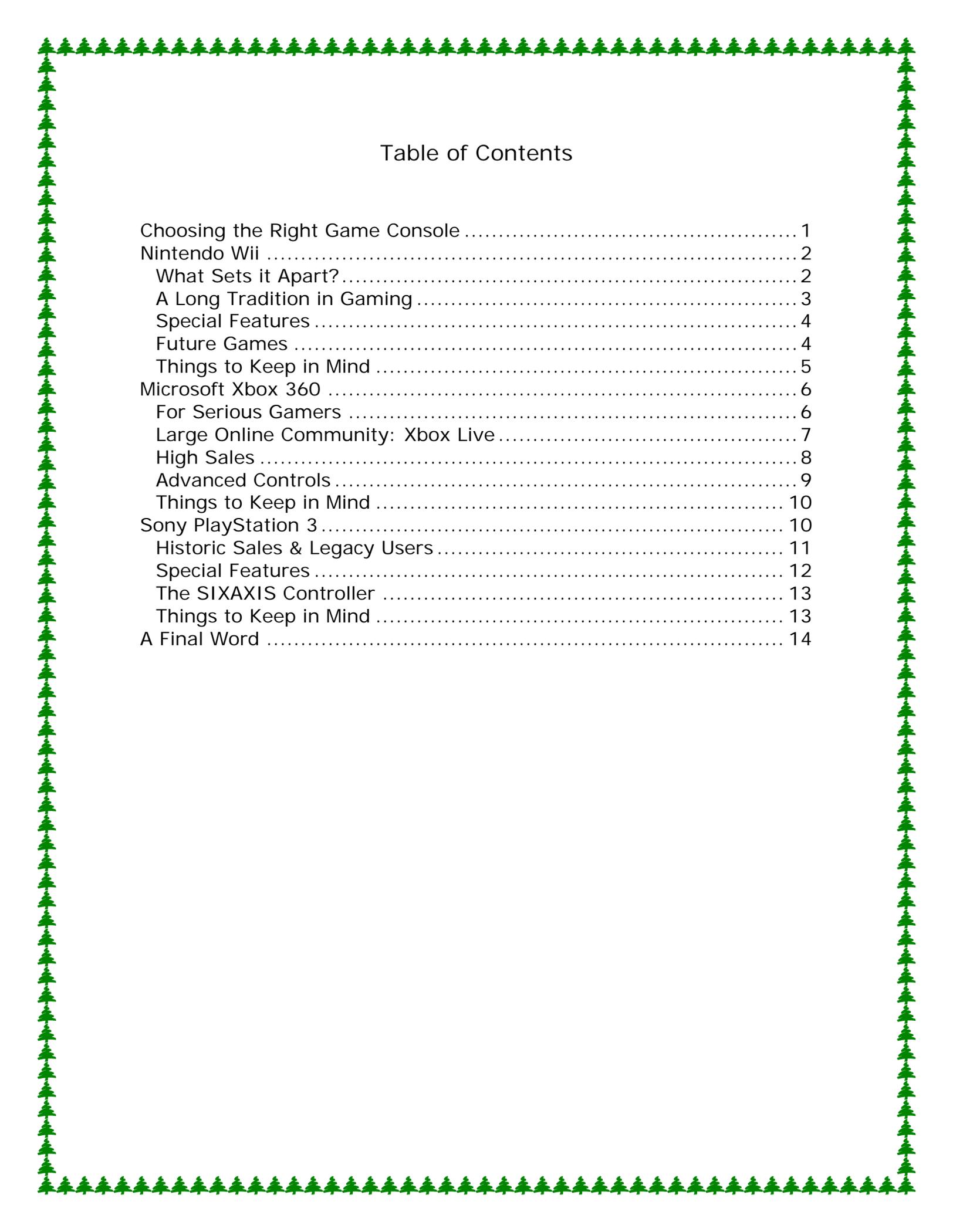


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Choosing the Right Game Console

All year that little boy or girl in your family, or grown-up boy or girl for that matter, has been doing his chores and making her bed every morning in order to make it onto Santa's coveted "nice" list. If you have a loved one who has stayed out of trouble and would love a new video game system for Christmas, you might want to do your homework before diving in and randomly picking a system.

There has never been a better time to give a video game system than right now. The combination of technological advancement and multiple manufacturers serves the consumer by providing a wealth of quality options to choose from. What is the right console to give that special someone? It depends on what they would most appreciate in a system. Here is a look at the different options available this year.

The premier consoles currently on the market are:

- Nintendo Wii
- Microsoft Xbox 360
- Sony Playstation 3

Choosing one system from these options can be difficult and the choice should not be taken lightly. Each console has features that set it apart from the others. Because the initial cost in purchasing a new system is at minimum \$250 (all prices USD), if a user decides they would like to change their gaming platform it is quite an investment. The only way to make a

good decision is to gather information about the different systems and determine what features are most appealing to the fortunate recipient of your thoughtful gift. Let's take a detailed look at each of the individual consoles.

Nintendo Wii

The Wii is the least expensive of the three consoles with a retail price of \$250. This price includes the game system, a stand that allows for vertical storage of the system, one Wii Remote (the primary controller), one Wii Nunchuk (additional controller option that connects to the Wii Remote), one Sensor Bar (allows the various devices to communicate with the system wirelessly and to enable the 3D aspect of Wii gaming), one external power adapter, one composite AV cable with RCA connectors, and a copy of the "Wii Sports" game (includes five sports simulations: Baseball, Bowling, Boxing, Golf, and Tennis).

What Sets it Apart?

There are two features that set the Wii apart from the other game consoles. The first is the Wii Remote that in addition to functioning as a wireless game controller, also allows the games played on the Wii to be played in a 3D format. The best way to describe this feature is that movement of the Remote in space is captured via the Sensor Bar and is communicated to the console where it registers the movement in the context of the game. An example of this is in the tennis simulation on "Wii Sports." The player moves the Wii remote to mimic the motion of a tennis stroke (forehand or

backhand). This movement directs the game character to hit the ball. It's almost as if the player is actually playing tennis.

The second standout feature for the Wii is the unique library of Nintendo game titles that have been hallmarks of their games throughout the generations of game systems they have produced. Their tendency has been to produce games with minimal violence and a focus on fun and fantasy.

A Long Tradition in Gaming

One of the big strengths of the Nintendo brand is its heritage as a manufacturer of games. This goes back to arcade games from the 70s and 80s such as "Donkey Kong" and "Mario Brothers." When Nintendo first produced its Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), it produced a game based loosely on the "Mario Brothers" arcade game titled, "Super Mario Brothers." The Super Mario franchise has grown to over ten titles over the years and the newest title, "Super Mario Galaxy," is scheduled to be released November 12, 2007.

While Super Mario is the most successful Nintendo franchise, there are several others that are also quite popular and only available on Nintendo platforms. This exclusivity of titles is something that both Sony and Microsoft have tried to emulate as a way to draw people to their platforms, but neither has the video game lineage that Nintendo does. This doesn't mean they won't be effective at this in the future, and they certainly are trying to reach this goal. Microsoft's Halo franchise success is evidence that

this strategy will continue to grow. Nintendo is the unquestionable leader of exclusive games and probably will continue to be into the near future. Other key franchises in the Nintendo library include: “Legend of Zelda,” “Metroid,” and “Mario Kart.”

Special Features

The Wii system, like the Microsoft and Sony platforms, offers an online gaming community. Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection is a free service run by Nintendo to enable people to play with or against others in different physical locations. As the name implies, the connection is made wirelessly. It is important to note that only games specifically designed to operate on the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection are able to utilize the service. As of November 2007, there are about 15 games available for the service. It is estimated that this number will more than double by the end of 2008. Using the online mode, a player may choose to play with friends, with people from their geographic region, or with people around the world.

The Wii offers parental controls that allow parents to restrict the playing of games for a specific age level. The system has the ability to be set for an age level. If a game is loaded with an age level rating that exceeds the system’s preset age level, it will not allow that title to play without a password to override the protection.

Future Games

A unique game that is scheduled to debut in early 2008 is “Wii Fit.” It is designed to help people find another way to exercise by incorporating various physical activities into the video game system. “Wii Fit” is composed of four specific disciplines: Aerobic Exercise, Muscle Conditioning, Yoga Poses, and Balance Games. “Wii Fit” will function with a peripheral device named Wii Balance Board. The board will have the ability to measure qualities such as a player’s Body Mass Index (BMI) and center of gravity. Various activities will include: push ups, step aerobics, yoga, soccer, and ski jumping just to name a few.

Things to Keep in Mind

Because of its popularity, it may be more difficult to find Wii consoles available at retailers as compared to the Sony PS3 or Microsoft Xbox 360. Hopefully Nintendo will make sure there is enough production to meet demand for the crucial holiday shopping season.

Strengths:

- Wii Remote for active gaming
- Access to Nintendo game titles
- Price

Weaknesses:

- Least sophisticated visuals of three major platforms
- Does not play DVDs
- Not HDTV compatible (highest resolution is 576i)

The official Wii website is: <http://wii.com/>

Microsoft Xbox 360

Microsoft made a big splash with its initial entry into video games with its Xbox release in 2001. Xbox 360 is their next generation console that came onto the market in North America in November of 2005. There are three configurations of Xbox 360 available: Xbox 360 Arcade, Xbox 360 Premium, and Xbox 360 Elite. The price range of these configurations ranges from \$280 to \$450.

The Arcade version includes one Wireless Controller, a 256MB memory unit, one composite AV cable, one HDMI 1.2 output, and five Xbox arcade titles on one disk (“Boom Boom Rocket,” “Feeding Frenzy,” “Luxor 2,” “Pac-Man Championship Edition,” and “UNO”). The Premium version includes everything in the Arcade edition and adds in additional games, a 20GB hard drive to store Xbox Live Arcade games, upgraded cables, and an HDMI port. The Elite system offers the Premium setup with the addition of a 120GB hard drive and a black color option that covers the console and the accessories, and a further enhanced games bundle.

For Serious Gamers

The Xbox 360 is considered to be more of a head-to-head competitor to the Playstation 3 than to the Wii. The reason for this is that both systems have

considerable hardware advantages over the Nintendo offering. Specifically, both the Xbox and PS3 have CPU (Central Processing Unit) engines based on 3.2GHz technology, while the Wii CPU is based on a 729 MHz engine.

Translated, this means that the systems with more robust CPUs, like the Xbox, will be able to play more complex and detailed games. Game designers consider this fact when creating games and are aware of what systems the titles will be played on throughout production. Because of this, the Xbox and PS3 are considered a preferred option for “serious” gamers who require the enhanced hardware capabilities to enjoy a more sophisticated visual experience.

Large Online Community: Xbox Live

A huge component of the Xbox experience is its online community, titled Xbox Live. This community is first and foremost a place where people can play games against one another, wherever in the world they may be. Xbox Live has two levels: Silver, which is free; and Gold, which requires a monthly, quarterly, or annual subscription.

Xbox Live has several attractive features. Voice chat is available, which allows players to talk with each other while they are playing via a compatible headset. The headset is included in some bundles and sold separately in others. There is also the ability to text or email players in other locations, and players can even send pictures via the Xbox Vision Camera (sold separately).

Gamers have the ability to enter different zones within the community to find others with similar gaming interests (recreation, pro, underground, family). Each gamer has a “gamertag,” which uniquely identifies that player within the community. That person has the ability to personify the tag with different avatars and mottos to make their online presence more of a reflection of their personality. Also, as the gamer achieves various gaming milestones, some of them are displayed on their gamertag. One more feature of Xbox Live is the Xbox Live Arcade where individuals can buy and download games to their console without leaving their homes.

High Sales

One important factor to consider, particularly when comparing the Xbox and PS3, is the level of sales of each of the two systems. It is generally considered that the Xbox has well outsold the PS3, even though the PS3 was released about a year earlier. One report of sales states that as of mid-September 2007, the worldwide sales of the Xbox was 8.9 million units, while the PS3 sold in the neighborhood of 3.7 million units.

You may wonder the relevance of the total sales of the two systems. The online community, which is proving to be very important in video gaming these days, will have a larger base of participants. While 3.7 million units worth of sales for the Sony machine is nothing to sneeze at, of greater concern is the continued investment in the PS3 in terms of innovation and support. Since the investment in one of these systems is at least a few

hundred dollars and if this sales delta continues, then it is important to examine how well they are supported. It is already clear that Microsoft has well supported the Xbox. Of course, Sony supports the PS3 community; however, at this time, Microsoft seems to garner more confidence in that area.

It should be noted that the Wii exceeds sales of both systems with 9 million units sold worldwide. This should help those that choose the Wii feel more confident about their choice. Still, the comparison between the PS3 and Xbox is very important because the systems are much more comparable.

Advanced Controls

One aspect of the Xbox 360 to note is that the controllers have more buttons than those for the Wii or the PS3. This can be seen either as an advantage or disadvantage, depending on the coordination and familiarity of the player. The large selection of buttons can be advantageous in that the game developer has more options at their disposal to allow the player to control the action. The flip side of this coin is that trying to find the intended button on the controller while trying to play a game can be a little more difficult.

Difficulties with this controller might normally be an issue for a player who is in the early stages of playing with an Xbox. Over time, it can be expected that the individual will become familiar with the layout and location of the controls and have an easy time playing with them. This is more of a potential problem for younger or significantly older players where a simpler

controller would be less of a barrier to enjoying a game. The PS3 controller has plenty of buttons as well; it is just a little more simple than the Xbox layout.

Things to Keep in Mind

Standout features of the Xbox 360 are the ability to play HD-DVD titles on the platform in addition to Xbox games, superior graphics, and access to popular titles that have been developed exclusively for Xbox including the immensely popular “Halo” series.

Strengths:

- Xbox Live online community
- Strong technical capabilities
- Large base of units already sold

Weaknesses:

- Controllers more complex than other systems
- Core console bundle is pretty minimal, even for the price savings
- No handheld gaming device option (Sony PSP and Nintendo DS are separate handheld systems)

The official Xbox 360 website is: <http://www.xbox.com>

Sony PlayStation 3

Sony's PlayStation franchise first debuted in late 1994. It evolved to the PlayStation 2 in 2000, and finally to its current incarnation as the PS3 in 2006. There have been many fluctuations in the versions available in North America, though it has recently simplified to two: a 40GB (\$399) version and an 80GB (\$499) system. Both versions include a High Definition Blu-Ray player, HDMI output for 1080p resolution, and one SIXAXIS Wireless Controller.

Historic Sales & Legacy Users

Earlier, we looked at the sales comparison of the Xbox 360 and the PS3 up to September of 2007. It is interesting to compare the sales of the previous generation of competing systems from Microsoft and Sony. Through May 2006, the original Xbox system (not the current 360 version) sold a total of 24 million units. While this is a solid sales number, it pales in comparison to the sales of Sony's PlayStation 2 through March of 2007. That number is a staggering 117 million consoles. What do these numbers mean when considering buying a PS3 or Xbox 360?

Ultimately, it is up to the buyer to derive their own conclusions. One idea to consider is that with such a strong history of PlayStation sales, it would be surprising if Sony did not continue to invest in the PlayStation 3. Also, there is obviously an enormous install base of PlayStation gamers that are likely still using the PS2. It is logical to assume that a considerable number of those legacy users will upgrade their systems to a current generation system some time in the future.

The price leap for the current systems with their superior hardware and technical capabilities certainly has been a financial barrier to sales. Both Sony and Microsoft have lowered their retail pricing from their initial launch prices as well as come up with alternative system configurations that carry a lower tag than the initial launch consoles.

Another way of looking at this is that both systems are in the early stages of their retail lives. The key question is: Will Sony catch up to Microsoft's impressive early sales lead? Much of this will hinge on marketing efforts that include pricing as well as availability of games only on the PS3 system. Sony's challenge is finding a way to draw its current PS2 users to the PS3 unit, and preventing Microsoft from luring them to the Xbox 360 platform.

Special Features

The Nintendo and Microsoft consoles have their respective online playing options and the Sony entry has one as well. The PlayStation Network is Sony's online community for gamers to play against one another and interact socially. Sony has promoted the PlayStation Network by stating that it will always be free, connected, and support multiplayer gaming. Via the Network, it is possible to purchase various games from the PS1 and PS2 platforms for between \$5 and \$15 per title. The price increases as the memory size of the game increases.

One particularly compelling feature of the PS3 that is not available on the Xbox 360 is the ability to connect the system to Sony's handheld game system, the PlayStation Portable (PSP). Some PS3 games integrate the PSP into the game; one example is "F1: Championship Edition," which utilizes an integrated PSP as an active rear-view mirror. Another interesting capability is that by connecting the PSP to the PS3, one can download games from the PlayStation Network directly to the PSP. This gives even more gaming flexibility by allowing players to take their games and play them away from their PS3 console.

The SIXAXIS Controller

What sets the PlayStation 3 apart from the other players are the SIXAXIS Controller and the Blu-Ray disc player. The SIXAXIS controller is a wireless controller that gives a bit of a 3D feel to the games, though not to the degree the Wii Remote does. The difference is that the Wii Remote can be moved over a distance and this movement is translated to the game. The SIXAXIS transmits tilting movement on three axes, but will not convey the movement of the controller over distance. The difference is subtle and it really comes down to how the feature is developed into the individual game being played.

Things to Keep in Mind

Strengths:

- Online community with access to legacy titles

- Strong technical capabilities, including ability to connect to PSP
- Enormous population of PlayStation 2 owners

Weaknesses:

- No compelling games designed solely for PS3
- Core console bundle is pretty minimal, even for the price savings
- Sales of PS3 system severely lagging behind Xbox 360

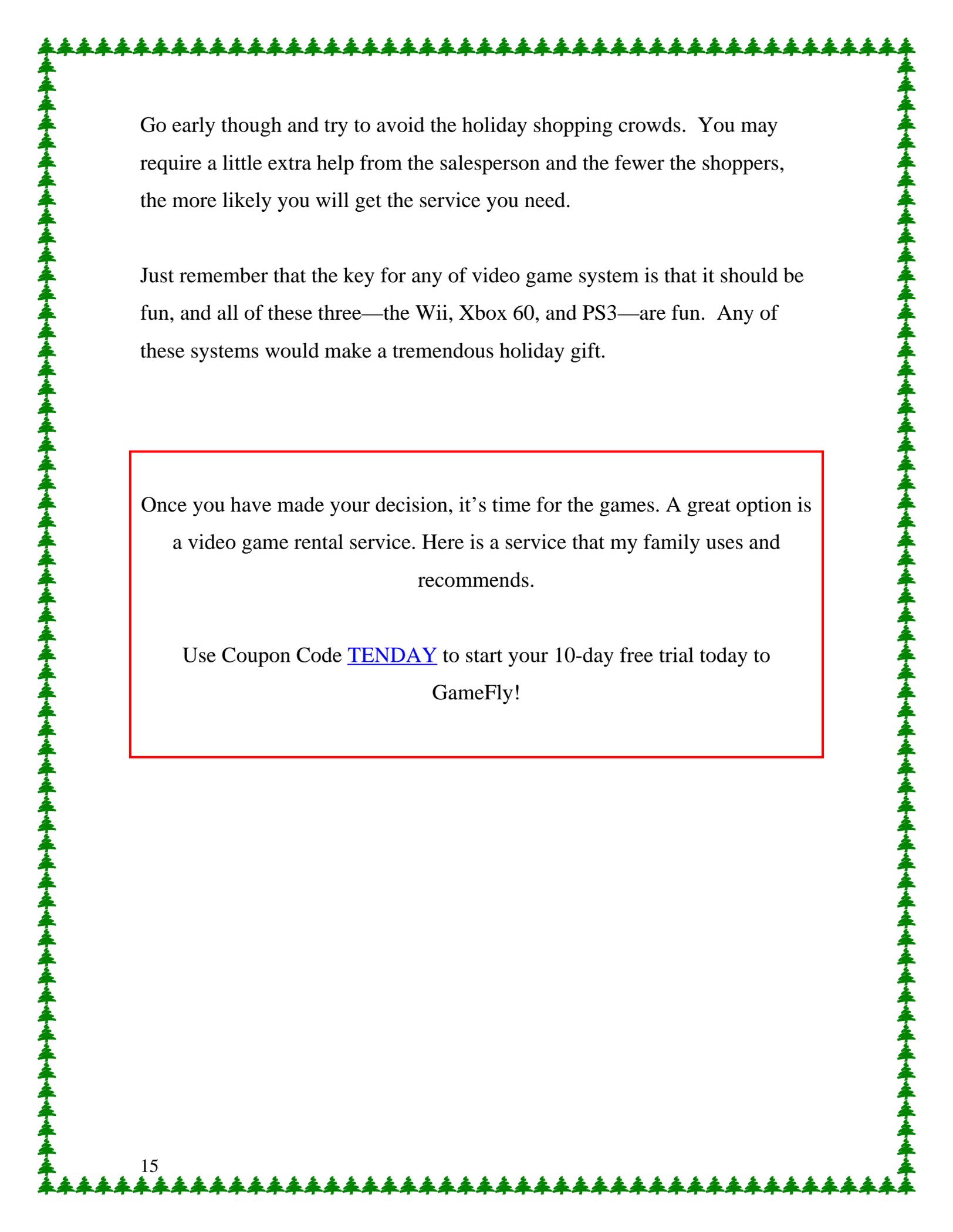
The official PlayStation 3 website is: <http://www.us.playstation.com/PS3>

A Final Word

Any of these systems has the ability to provide for years of entertainment and enjoyment. Many people would enjoy receiving any of the three. Understanding what a person would like in a system and how they would use it is going to be the best guide for choosing a console.

Important aspects to consider are the friends of the person you are considering giving a system to. If that person's friends are also video game players, it would be a good idea to determine what system they play on and consider purchasing that console. More than ever, video games are a way for friends to connect, interact, and share experiences.

You might try visiting a local retailer that sells video game systems and see for yourself what each gaming experience has to offer. Each system has a unique look and feel that has to be experienced in person to be understood.



Go early though and try to avoid the holiday shopping crowds. You may require a little extra help from the salesperson and the fewer the shoppers, the more likely you will get the service you need.

Just remember that the key for any of video game system is that it should be fun, and all of these three—the Wii, Xbox 60, and PS3—are fun. Any of these systems would make a tremendous holiday gift.

Once you have made your decision, it's time for the games. A great option is a video game rental service. Here is a service that my family uses and recommends.

Use Coupon Code [TENDAY](#) to start your 10-day free trial today to GameFly!