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Sony's Latest Blu-ray Gambit: A \$600 Player



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Sony will release its second Blu-ray Disc player for about \$400 less than its current one. The \$600 BDP-S300 will feature a new design, advanced audio codecs, Bravia Theater Sync and CD playback. Blu-ray technology is going head-to-head with HD DVD over which format will become the next-generation standard to replace today's DVDs.

[Sony](#) (NYSE: SNE)  fired the latest salvo in the ongoing high-definition format war Monday when it announced that it will release its second Blu-ray Disc player for about US\$400 less than its current one.

Priced at about \$600, the new BDP-S300 model will sport a new design, advanced audio codecs, Bravia Theater Sync and CD playback. It will be capable of outputting 1920 x 1080p (progressive) high-definition video -- currently the highest resolution high-definition signal available through an HDMI connection -- and will support multiple video formats including MPEG2, MPEG4-AVC and VC1. It is due to be released this summer, Sony officials said.


Widely Compatible

The new Blu-ray Disc player is compatible with most standard DVDs and also offers 1080p upscaling through HDMI to 1080p-capable HDTVs. The result is improved performance even on existing DVDs, officials said. It outputs signals at 24 frames per second for images that approximate film quality.

Sony's first Blu-ray Disc player was designed for the enthusiast and early adopter, according to the company. Following the strong reception to that one, a lower-cost version seemed to be the next clear step, Sony said.

The PlayStation 3 includes a built-in Blu-ray player, and is priced at about the same level as the new, standalone BDP-S300 model, but for those who don't have an interest in gaming, the standalone player could make more sense.

Format Wars

Blu-ray technology is going head-to-head with HD DVD over which format will become the next-generation standard to replace today's DVDs. The HD DVD format is backed by a consortium headed by [Toshiba](#) , while Blu-ray is backed by a group led by Sony. Until things are decided, early adopters face a difficult choice as to which format they invest in.

So far, HD DVD offerings have been priced lower than Blu-ray ones have, so lower Blu-ray prices could help early


adopters over that hurdle.

"This is much better," Rob Enderle, president and principal analyst with the Enderle Group, told TechNewsWorld. "Sony is hitting the market just ahead of Toshiba HD DVD players, which are priced aggressively as well."

Will It Be Enough?

Whether the price drop is enough to convince users remains to be seen.



"This gives Blu-ray another edge," Adrienne Downey, senior analyst with Semico Research, told TechNewsWorld. "But they need to come out with something that's more like \$299 or \$199 in order for Blu-ray to really take off. Not much will happen on either side until prices come down to the \$200 to \$300 range."


Indeed, "I don't think people are all that impressed with it so far," Jim Nail, chief strategy and [marketing](#)  officer for Cymfony, told TechNewsWorld. "It's almost cheaper to buy a PlayStation 3. They're competing with their own product, and it's still \$200 more than an HD DVD player."

Waiting for a Clear Lead

Game enthusiasts have expressed significant resentment at being forced into Blu-ray technology if they buy a PlayStation 3, Nail noted, as well as at Sony's prices, and this latest offering doesn't address those issues. "Those discussions are still going on," he said. "It's far from settled."

So although Sony has acknowledged the need for lower prices, that may not be enough to win consumers into its camp.

"The PlayStation 3 didn't give Blu-ray the pop it needed, and [Microsoft's](#) (Nasdaq: MSFT)   Xbox didn't give HD DVD the pop it needed," Enderle said.

"The difficulty is, neither side has a significant lead right now," he continued. "This price drop brings the two formats into parity, but until one side has a definitive lead, consumers are probably not going to buy in." 

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