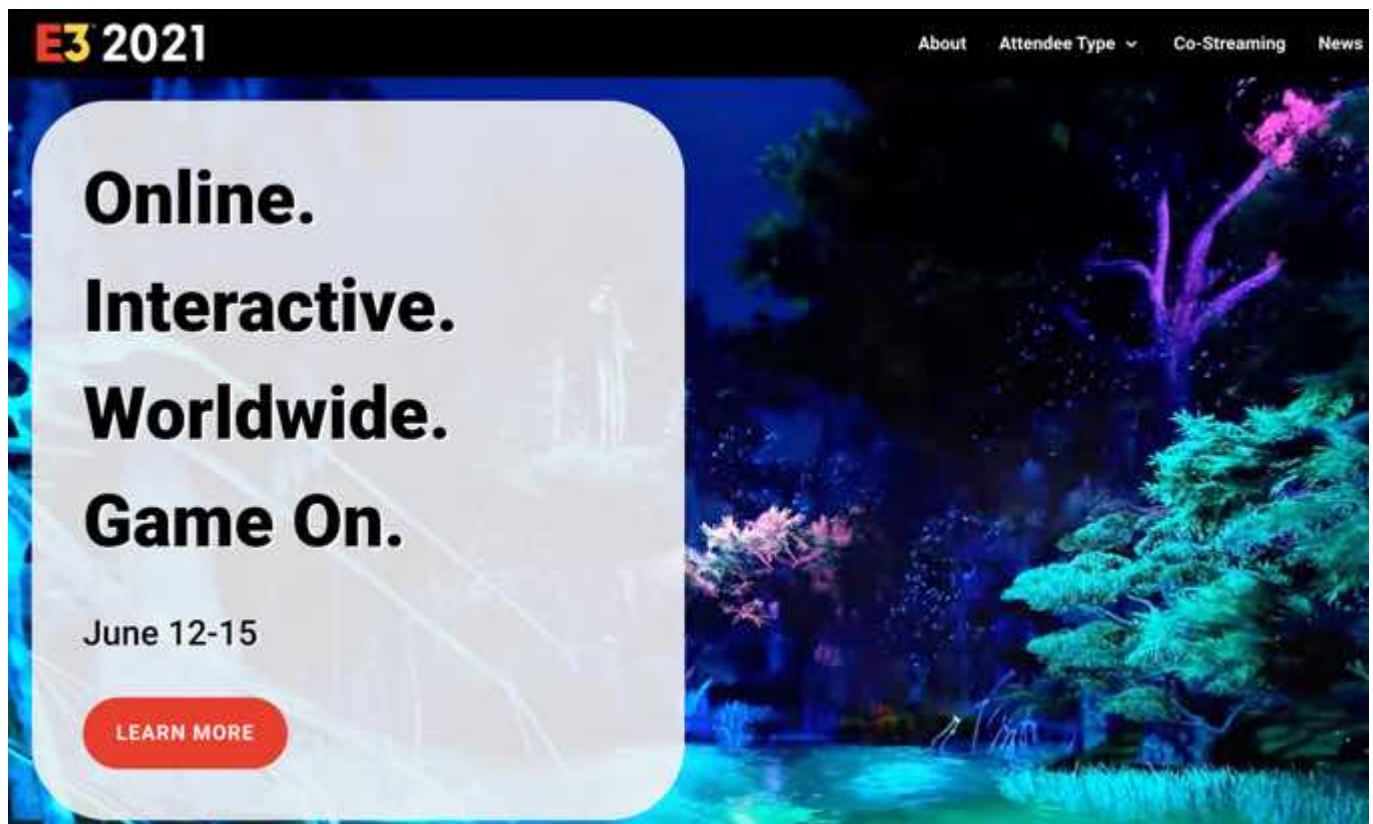


E3 Will Happen Virtually This Year



The E3 event is one of the biggest highlights of the year for gamers. It's as big an event for the people who make video games as it is for the people to play them. The biggest titles for the twelve months ahead tend to be unveiled to the waiting world at E3, along with the latest hardware innovations. There's always a lot of hype, and there are always a few surprises. Perhaps the biggest surprise in E3 history, though, was the fact that it [didn't happen at all last year](#).

There's something a little ironic about an event that's so rooted in all things digital not managing to find a way to stage itself digitally last year. Many film festivals managed to find a way to go ahead with a virtual, remote, or digital format, but E3 didn't. That was probably because the cancellation came at such an early stage of the pandemic when cancelling things altogether was seen as the safest way to

proceed. It's also possible that the event's organisers wanted to go ahead but were ultimately unable to do so because so many companies pulled out. A showcase event is nothing if it doesn't actually have anything to showcase, which is how E3 2020 might have ended up if it had carried on regardless.

All of that is in the past now, though. [E3 2021 is going ahead](#) – but it still won't quite be the kind of E3 event that you remember. Although restrictions are easing across the world, E3's organisers and partners still don't quite feel comfortable enough to stage an in-person gathering. This year's booths will be virtual, and their audiences will be watching from home through live streams. We've at least been promised that the live streams will be "interactive," although we've already had some bad news with the confirmation that Konami won't be sending any representatives or presenting us with any information. That might not be the only bad news we receive as the June event moves closer. We've seen the list of confirmed attendees, and there are some notable omissions.

The biggest name missing from the confirmed list of exhibitors is Sony. Despite the PlayStation 5 still being within the first twelve months of its release and Sony recently confirming that it's working on more than twenty-five PS5-specific new games, the Japanese company doesn't seem to believe that attending E3 in its virtual format is a worthwhile use of its time. It might not even be the virtual format that's put Sony off. They didn't exhibit in 2019, and they pulled out of the 2020 event long before its eventual cancellation was announced. The precise nature of the disagreement between Sony and E3 is unknown, but it might be down to Sony wishing to stage an equivalent virtual event of its own this year instead.

One company that's definitely taken that approach is Electronic Arts. Instead of showcasing any of its 2021 and 2022 titles at E3, EA will instead host "EA Play Live" in July. The company believes that it's big enough and has a

large enough following to stage an event like E3 on its own without the need to share the spotlight with other game designers and studios. It might be right. The demands of staging a virtual event aren't as high as those of staging a physical event, so other companies may yet decide to take the same route.

Those omissions leave a gaping hole in the schedule, and there are rumours about a potential surprising series of replacement. There are unconfirmed reports that online slots companies will be welcome to promote their wares to adult audiences through the event. This would be a controversial move to some, but also probably an inevitable one. Online slots count as digital gaming, and the amount of revenue made by online slots websites and other companies active in the sector indicates that millions of gamers enjoy playing their creation. There are even online slots based on popular video games available in places like [Rose Slots for New Zealand players](#), confirming an apparent crossover in the popularity of the formats. We haven't had direct confirmation that this is happening yet, but don't be surprised if the rumours turn out to be true.

If you want to book your (virtual) place at this year's E3, registration will go live a little later on in May. Registration gives you access to a user portal, which allows visitors to create profiles for themselves and meet other gamers in "online lounges," which sound to us like regular internet chatrooms. Video content and "special events" (the nature of which are thus far unspecified) will be held within digital exhibitor booths. This is precisely the sort of thing that virtual reality headsets would be perfect for if enough users owned them. A VR E3 would be vastly superior to what's currently being proposed, but sadly we're not quite at the point of being able to deliver one in terms of either uptake or technology.

Aside from the interactive parts of the event, there will also

be regular broadcasts and press conferences, panels with industry insiders in a format that will presumably be similar to Zoom, and showcases for selected individual games. A special E3 2021 app has already been developed and can be downloaded already from your usual app store, although you can't do anything with it yet. Streams of the event will be available through E3s official social media accounts and will be available to casual viewers, but those viewers won't get access to the restricted content that registered "attendees" will be able to see.

Hopefully, this will be the last time we ever have to make do with an E3 that isn't what it ought to be. The question is whether the two years gap between in-person E3 events will do anything to harm the long-term future of the event. Sony clearly isn't keen on coming back, EA thinks it can do a better job on its own, and Konami doesn't feel like it's worth turning up. That's not exactly a ringing endorsement from some of the biggest names in the business. By the time E3 2022 rolls around, it will have a lot of work to do to restore its reputation as the "must-see" gaming event of the year.