Everything we know about the first discless Xbox One, coming May 7 for $249



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- This is the Xbox One S All-Digital Edition. Sure looks like an existing Xbox One S, doesn’t it?
- The existing Xbox One S and its new, no-disc sibling. Other than that solid panel where the disc drive slot used to be, they’re identical.
- New box, seen from the front.
- DISC-FREE GAMING. DISC-FREE GAMING. DISC-FREE GAMING.
- It appears Microsoft forgot to put the French and Spanish translations on this North American box mock-up. English repeats three times in every slot for some reason.

The Xbox One S All-Digital Edition will be the first major home console in the disc-media era to ship without an optical drive, Microsoft has confirmed. The new system will launch on May 7 in the United States and bears such a resemblance to the existing Xbox One S that they share an identical outside shell and motherboard, only with a plastic blocker where the disc drive's slot used to be.

In an interview with Ars Technica, Microsoft's Platform and Devices GM Jeff Gattis confirmed an MSRP of $249, which includes the discless console (currently only in "bone white"), one matching Xbox One controller, an internal 1TB hard drive, and three bundled game-download codes: *Minecraft*, *Sea of Thieves*, and *Forza Horizon 3*. This model will launch "in most Xbox One markets" on May 7, Microsoft says, and all existing Xbox One accessories will be compatible with the All-Digital Edition, owing to its identical motherboard.

Gattis explained that this price point will "pass the value of removing the disc drive onto the customer." I asked him, however, how he reckons that with the fact that, as of press time, most retailers list existing Xbox One S bundles (complete with at least one pack-in game) at a $249 price point.

"I'm painfully aware of it," Gattis said, before suggesting that "right now, if you walk into retailers like Best Buy, [the existing Xbox One S] is a $299 product." As of press time, however, both Best Buy and the Microsoft Store list compelling Xbox One S 1TB bundles for $249.

Even so, Gattis explained Microsoft's intention to maintain a "$50 delta" between the disc-drive Xbox One S (which includes 4K Blu-ray support) and the no-disc XB1S All-Digital Edition: "Over time, those same price deltas will be passed to the All-Digital Edition. It's about maintaining the price gap. It's $50 less. I'd expect those ratios to hold once the All-Digital Edition is on the market."

Gattis hinted to that $50 delta also figuring into major sales promotions like Black Friday: “I’m not confirming a [All-Digital Edition] $149 price [during Black Friday], but there’ll be a $50 gap between the two products.” But Gattis didn’t explain how that $50 price delta will emerge on May 7 and seems to be currently passing that buck to retailers.

“Would it be nice if it was smaller? Sure”

While the Xbox One S was already an impressive shrinking of the original Xbox One, Gattis says Microsoft decided to pass on shrinking this new hardware revision any further, even though the XB1S’ Blu-ray drive (at 47.9 square inches) takes up 18.6 percent of its volume.

When asked why Microsoft chose not to shrink the All-Digital Version any further, Gattis emphasized the “value” of this XB1S model. “Reworking the motherboard and chassis, we could get to a smaller form factor, but that time and engineering cost would make it less attractive from a consumer-value standpoint,” he told Ars. “Some people may think it took less than 10 minutes to do this, but we had to go through a new testing cycle, quality control, and so on.”

When pressed about whether Microsoft’s product-design team is perhaps too busy building an entirely new console—the one already announced by Xbox chief Phil Spencer—Gattis simply acknowledged “another generational console.” He then added, “at this stage in the generation, we thought this was the right thing to do to not invest a bunch of time redesigning [Xbox One S]’ form factor. Would it be nice if [the All-Digital Edition] was smaller? Sure. Our market research says there’s demand for this new product as-is.”

“Not trying to push a digital agenda”

Curiously, the All-Digital Version does not come with any bundle for the Xbox Game Pass, a subscription service that lets Xbox One owners download and play a huge selection of games so long as they’re paying subscribers. This console’s existence seems absolutely primed for something like Xbox Game Pass, which dumps enough games into paying users’ hands to perhaps make them forget about that disc drive in the first place.

When asked about the lack of bundled Game Pass offer, Gattis explained that “when you bundle something like that [in a console purchase], it doesn’t get the uptake and conversion”—perhaps because first-time subscribers don’t have to enter credit card information when using a free voucher code. Thus, buyers of the XB1S All-Digital Edition will be presented with some form of first-time subscriber offer for Xbox Game Pass, which normally costs $10/month but currently includes a first-time price of $1 for players’ first three months.

Gattis says that this new console’s offer will be “richer” and that “we are going to experiment.” But he declined to offer more specifics. [**Update**: Minutes after this article went live, Xbox’s Larry “Major Nelson” Hyrb confirmed that new XB1S All-Digital Edition owners will get an offer for three months of Xbox Game Pass for $1.]

He had no news for Xbox fans who might want to transfer their older disc-based games to a no-disc console. When asked about a rumored trade-in program for older games, Gattis didn’t have a solid answer. “You can guess we’re well aware of that and want to find a way to solve that,” he told Ars. “We have nothing to share yet.”

For now, Microsoft intends to sell this model alongside the Xbox One S and Xbox One X. “This is additive,” Gattis told Ars. “We’re not trying to push a digital agenda. We’ve seen a customer segment that prefers to buy [its] content digitally. At the end of the day, this is about choice.”

The Xbox One S All-Digital Edition comes nearly 10 years after Sony tried its hand at a discless revision of a system, though it did so with the portable PSP Go. That hardware revision did turn out smaller than its predecessor, though that meant a more cramped control situation, which we didn’t care for at the time. Today’s news also reminds us of the Nintendo Wii’s 2011 revision, which removed its GameCube ports and Wi-Fi chip while only slightly lowering the price.

In his opening notes about the new console, Gattis suggested that market research included comments from a “Generation-Z audience” who wondered aloud, “isn’t this going to cost more than the One S thanks to the added convenience?” But it’s hard to agree. This new Xbox One model takes away a few major conveniences, like movie-on-disc playback, support for disc-based games whose digital versions have been delisted due to expiring licenses, and the perk of trading or selling a game once you’re done with it.

And without a volume-slimming hardware revision, the only perk we’re getting in exchange is a “$50 delta” that is currently in retailers’ hands to enforce, not Microsoft’s.

Listing image by Microsoft

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