Microsoft’s Xbox Live is coming to Switch, iOS, Android

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Xbox Live users will soon be able to take their “gaming achievement history, their friends list, their clubs, and more” to games on the Nintendo Switch and mobile platforms. That’s according to a Game Developers Conference session description recently posted ahead of the March conference (and first noticed by Windows Central).

The conference session is titled “Xbox Live: Growing & Engaging Your Gaming Community Across iOS, Android, Switch, Xbox, and PC” and is led by members of the Xbox team. It promises a first look at a new “cross-platform XDK” that will “enable game developers to connect players between iOS, Android, and Switch in addition to Xbox and any game in the Microsoft Store on Windows PCs.” That will expand the *potential* audience for Xbox Live from 400 million gaming devices to over 2 billion, by Microsoft’s count—the service currently has 68 million active players, Microsoft says.

The next step

Microsoft has been slowly opening up the Xbox platform's walled garden for years now. Back in 2014, Microsoft bought *Minecraft* maker Mojang but continued to support the game on many non-Microsoft platforms. In 2016, the company officially opened up the Xbox One to allow for gameplay with players on other platforms, eventually pressuring Sony to reluctantly do the same.

But the SDK being described in this conference talk seems to go a step further, letting Switch and mobile gamers access all the "social, communication, and multiplayer interaction" features of Xbox Live. That could be an especially big boon on Switch, which offers extremely limited messaging capabilities and requires a separate smartphone app as its "official" voice chat solution (though some Switch games, like *Fortnite*, use their own native voice chat services).

Sony's PlayStation platform is notably absent from Microsoft's session description. That could be because Microsoft sees Sony's PS4, and its native PlayStation Network, as more direct competitors to the Xbox One and Xbox Live in the living room console space. On the other side, it also seems likely that Sony would be reluctant to let Microsoft's branded social network get full access to what is still a relatively closed console platform.

Microsoft has shown some willingness to work with mobile and portable gaming platforms in the past, though. A number of Microsoft Game Studios titles have appeared on Nintendo's portable systems, including a couple of *Age of Empires* titles and a *Viva Pinata* port. And just last year, Microsoft announced a Funko-themed *Gears of War* spinoff would be hitting iOS and Android soon.

The session description also makes mention of developers using Microsoft's PlayFab gaming services to allow "communities to

mingle more freely across platforms.” That platform-agnostic matchmaking and network demand-management service launched in preview last November after Microsoft purchased the company behind it in early 2018.

Microsoft’s apparent Xbox Live move follows a similar announcement from Epic Games, which in December said it would begin sharing the cross-platform online services used in *Fortnite* with developers free of charge. Now that cross-platform gameplay and services are all but expected in the gaming world, the gold rush is on to be the company that controls the social and networking infrastructure behind those games.

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