

Sony is gearing up for a new cloud gaming push amid rumors of a PlayStation handheld

Now that Google Stadia is dead and buried, it looks like Sony may seriously care about cloud gaming again. Despite a recent round of layoffs, Sony is currently hiring 22 roles related to cloud gaming tech – including one person whose job will literally be to “Develop and deliver the strategic vision for cloud game streaming at PlayStation.”

“Are you a ground-breaking innovator in the cloud streaming product space? Then you likely agree that Cloud Gaming is on its way to becoming a major part of the gaming industry,” reads part of a Sony job posting for a Director of Product Management for Cloud Gaming.

That person won’t be alone: Sony is *also* hiring five senior platform engineers, three software engineers, two technical project managers and at least one technical writer, four reliability engineers (and a manager), an additional devops engineer, a junior network engineer, a senior business intelligence analyst, a security architect, and a network capacity planner, many of which will report to the company’s Future Technology Group.

Those job postings begin:

As a member of Sony Interactive Entertainment’s Future Technology Group (FTG), you’ll have the opportunity to lead the charge in the cloud gaming revolution. FTG is at the forefront of putting console-quality video games on any device.

The company previously listed a Director of Hardware Engineering as well, tasked with driving “vision, research, and development for SIE’s custom servers, rack designs and high-speed fabrics” and “innovation towards our next-generation technology.” Sony was also looking for a principal hardware architect “to shape the future of PlayStation’s composable data center infrastructure for cloud gaming and machine learning” back in 2021, as well as a cloud gaming systems architect.

While the Future Technology Group also states it does R&D for Sony’s VR headsets, game controllers, and even software features like the “GT Sophy” AI driver in *Gran Turismo*, some roles are very clearly pointed toward the service formerly known as PlayStation Now.

“Cloud gaming” isn’t a euphemism here

The Senior Business Intelligence Analyst, for instance, will be working on “analysis for the cloud gaming experience”; the Security Architect “will focus on the Future Technology and Cloud Gaming business area.” The postings are all clear that streaming games to millions of people across a variety of devices is the goal – unlike Google, Sony isn’t using the phrase “cloud gaming” as a euphemism for live services.

Many of the job postings are also looking for candidates in Aliso Viejo, California – the former home of Gaikai, the cloud gaming pioneer that Sony bought a decade ago. “Future Technology Group” appears to be a relatively new name for that team: it was formerly called Cloud Gaming Engineering and Infrastructure, or CGEI for short. Some of the networking roles are also in Australia, suggesting Sony might finally offer cloud gaming in the country.

The job postings also suggest Sony is working on new hybrid cloud infrastructure with Kubernetes and Amazon’s AWS – not necessarily Microsoft Azure.

The fact that the job postings mention Amazon's cloud and not Microsoft's cloud is intriguing all on its own: didn't Sony publicly announce it would use Microsoft's tech in 2019? But as of 2021, PlayStation CEO Jim Ryan told *Nikkei* (via *VGC*) the two companies had yet to get past the "exchanging ideas" stage. And it's not like the companies still need to hedge against Google Stadia and Amazon Luna anymore since both competitors had anemic market share even before Google killed Stadia.

Besides, Microsoft looks a heck of a lot more like a Sony competitor than a friend these days. Even if we ignore their increasingly public fight over the Activision Blizzard deal, the UK Competition and Markets Authority believes Xbox Cloud Gaming had three to seven times the market share of Sony's cloud gaming efforts as of last year. Just today, Microsoft hinted it will add PC games to its cloud gaming service as it launches its non-cloud PC Game Pass in 40 new countries.

There's nothing to suggest that Sony will imminently launch its own next-gen cloud gaming service. I'd expect the opposite, given that the company's still hiring people to figure out its cloud gaming vision and develop the underlying infrastructure.

But it's clearly top of mind for Sony, and not just because the Future Technology Group is currently hiring for more roles than any other part of PlayStation – but also because Sony is aggressively pushing to patent cloud gaming technology.

Mark Cerny himself, the man who led development on the PS5 and PS4, now has his name on a host of 2022 and even 2023 patent applications around cloud gaming, and the company has filed for dozens upon dozens of patents and patent continuations directly related to the tech, according to my search.

Some of the patents being continued date back to the early days of Gaikai, but many newer ones explore using the power of

multiple GPUs to power a single person's game – or even a single person's view through a VR headset. One holy grail of cloud gaming is an experience that would never have been possible outside the cloud, but no company has yet released a cloud-native game, only features for ones that still run without its help. (Hideo Kojima has said he's working on one with Microsoft, though, and Microsoft hired Kim Swift, the woman behind *Portal*, to build a cloud-native game team.)

a: hover]: text-gray-63 [>a: hover]: shadow-underline-black
dark: [>a: hover]: text-gray-bd dark: [>a: hover]: shadow-underline-gray
[>a]: shadow-underline-gray-63 dark: [>a]: text-gray-bd dark: [>a]: shadow-underline-gray">Image: USPTO

Sony has also been trying to patent ways to share a single GPU across multiple applications – which could help with the unwieldy economics of cloud gaming, where a company traditionally has to have a remote computer waiting for each player – pause and resume games in the cloud, hand them off to different devices, stream them to a web browser, deal with unreliable cellular internet connections, and more, patent applications reveal.

Sony may have squandered the future of gaming, but it seems a lot has happened since I wrote that story in 2019. I'm not even counting how the company snapped up Jade Raymond and her new studio Haven fresh off a stint leading cloud-native games for Google Stadia.

(That's not rhetorical; I'm not counting it because she told *GamesIndustry.biz* she's now more focused on helping developers create games in the cloud than letting users play them there. Sony even refers to the company as a "Live Services Developer," not a game studio, in financial briefings.)

So let's talk about the Q Lite, that rumored new PlayStation handheld.

I've been thinking about it for days, and I just can't believe

Sony would make a new handheld gaming system that *only* streams games from your own PS5 via Remote Play, as *Insider Gaming's* Tom Henderson's sources suggested. If such a handheld existed, why would Sony purposefully keep it from playing Sony's cloud games as well? It's not like it'd make for a pricier handheld – whether you're streaming across a room or across the country, the core technology is the same.

But I couldn't see Sony *relying* on its current lackluster cloud gaming services to sell a new handheld, either, not after it hid its entire PlayStation Now cloud gaming service behind the priciest tier of PlayStation Plus, lumping it in with features only console owners would spend money for.

So sure, let's imagine the Q Lite is just a console companion at launch. Maybe Sony even bundles it with a multiyear subscription to that pricey PlayStation Plus tier for those who want to do everything possible with their console. But maybe it doesn't stay that way for long.

When Sony's ready with its next-gen cloud gaming service, I imagine any Q Lite would be ready as well – with the integrated controls, interfaces, and purpose-designed streaming hardware it needs to become a true PlayStation Portable.

If you've got inside info about Sony's cloud gaming plans, hit me up at sean@theverge.com from a non-work machine; I'll give you my Signal so we can chat securely.

<https://www.theverge.com/23677968/sony-cloud-gaming-playstation-now-jobs-patents>