Unexpected 3DS update breaks many common homebrew hacking methods



Enlarge / A few of the 3DS variations that were once supported by Nintendo.
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It has been years since Nintendo stopped producing its Nintendo 3DS line of portable hardware and months since the company officially shut down the 3DS eShop for new downloadable game purchases. But those facts haven’t stopped the company from issuing a new firmware update that seems at least partly focused on impeding some of the most common

methods for installing homebrew software on the defunct console.

Monday night's surprise release of 3DS firmware Ver. 11.17.0-50 is the first official system update for the console since last September and the fifth update since the hardware was officially discontinued in 2020. The official patch notes for the sudden update cover the now-standard (if vague) promise of "further improvements to overall system stability and other minor adjustments [that] have been made to enhance the user experience."

But console hacking groups quickly noticed that downloading the update ruined many of the documented hacking methods that could previously be used to install custom 3DS firmware.

The good news for 3DS homebrew fans, according to users of the Nintendo Homebrew Discord, is that the new firmware update doesn't seem to break custom firmware that was installed prior to any version 11.17 download. That means players who haven't yet installed Nintendo's firmware update can still use any extant hacking method to customize their console without worry.

For those who have updated to version 11.17, things get a bit more complicated depending on the region and hardware model in question. For systems in the New 3DS line, a browser-based hacking method called super-skaterhax still works for consoles from the European or Japanese regions. This method is expected to be "fixed" for US consoles "in the coming days," according to the Nintendo Homebrew Discord.

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If you have an "old" 3DS or 2DS model, however, options get more limited. Currently, the only working software-based hacking method for these consoles involves access to a DSiWare title that has been (or can be) downloaded to the system. Other hacking methods, including ones that rely on access to

specific software like *Cubic Ninja*, no longer work under the new firmware, and it’s unclear if or when these methods will be updated.

Community members have already put together a handy interactive guide to walk users through which hacking methods will and won’t work under the latest firmware update, as well as ones that are expected to work in the near future. But the Nintendo Homebrew Discord warns that “old” 3DS hardware is “not currently expected to have a free-software-only exploit” for installing homebrew and recommends using a pre-hacked flashcart to get around the system’s updated security.

In the long run, this new update seems destined to be a mere speedbump for 3DS owners who want to enjoy homebrew software on their legacy portables (which, of course, includes the potential for emulated and pirated software). Still, it’s a bit galling to see Nintendo working to patch security holes on a platform for which it no longer has any active interest in producing or selling any hardware or software.

After all, the last major homebrew-breaking system update for the Wii was released in 2010, well before Nintendo halted hardware production in 2013. This time, we have to wonder just how long Nintendo will be willing to continue the cat-and-mouse security battle with those who want to hack a functionally dead platform.

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