What handheld PCs should do to fight the Nintendo Switch 2

I stopped buying most games for my Nintendo Switch the day I bought a Steam Deck. My Switch has been a Mario and Zelda machine ever since. It’s simple: the Steam Deck took the Switch’s best trick — pick-up-and-play portability — while offering more games that run better. I can easily resume the ones I started on my desktop PC, or continue to play portable titles on my desktop and marvel at improved graphics.

But the Nintendo Switch 2, coming later this year, may change that value proposition. Not only will it continue to be *the* console that attracts families and kids with inventive, surprising, must-try exclusive Nintendo games that use its detachable Joy-Cons’ many tricks, but it also has a real chance at convincing the enthusiasts who might otherwise buy a handheld gaming PC — or who were waiting for handheld PCs to become less of a wild west.

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The Switch 2 may meet or beat the Steam Deck in performance. If history’s any indication, it should *easily* sell better than every handheld gaming PC combined. When the original Nintendo Switch launched nearly eight years ago, there was almost nothing to play but *Zelda*, and Nintendo held its game catalog in an iron grip — but now, the backwards-compatible Switch 2 will launch with one of the largest and most welcoming

libraries of all time, rivaled only by smartphones and computers. The Switch could theoretically become the new baseline for game developers to target, and the most reliable place to find new handheld-friendly titles.

So: How can the budding handheld PC revolution escape the shadow of the Switch 2? I won't say I know for sure, but I *did* just check the industry's temperature at CES 2025, the world's biggest tech show — and I'm afraid PC handhelds may stay in that shadow unless the industry does more.

Handheld ergonomics was one bright spot going into 2025. While I still prefer the Deck's overall feel, practically every PC handheld I touched had nicely sculpted grips that made them more comfortable to hold than their predecessors. From the 8-inch MSI Claw 8 AI Plus and Lenovo Legion Go S, to the 8.8-inch Legion Go 2, and the giant 11-inch Tencent Sunday Dragon, even the largest Windows handhelds didn't feel as awkward as some of their first-gen predecessors.

There are four places I think the industry has to change — and maybe, band together — if these handhelds want a meaningful piece of the Switch.

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necessarily a bad idea!

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Screen

This one’s easy: to maximize performance, battery life, economies of scale, and offer a closer-to-game-console experience, handheld PC makers should *universally adopt* a 1080p-or-lower-resolution HDR OLED screen with variable refresh rate.

Many PC manufacturers are wasting what little performance they can muster from a handheld chip and battery on a screen with far too many pixels for the task, artificially constraining performance and battery life in exchange for 1600p or 1200p sharpness that most gamers won’t miss on a 7-inch to 8-inch panel. Additionally, every handheld *without* a variable refresh rate screen is likely wasting a good chunk of the frames that their handheld can serve because their screen is artificially limiting their framerate — VRR was the Asus ROG Ally’s secret weapon, letting it play games more smoothly than competing handhelds even if rivals’ chips offered the same FPS.

Lastly, HDR is a revelation on the Steam Deck OLED’s screen, letting both native titles and the HDR games I stream from my PS5 feel like they’re filled with real light that explodes out of the screen. It’s something Windows desktops and laptops have never consistently offered the way today’s consoles do, but handhelds could be the gateway to changing that.

Is a screen like the one I’m describing expensive or hard to find? Band together, PC companies, and surely a display maker can change that for you.

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underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*The MSI Claw 8 AI Plus uses an Intel Lunar Lake chip.*

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>The Steam Deck still starts at $399, even if the $529 OLED model is superior.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Price

The PC industry also needs to cut prices if it wants a chance to eat Nintendo’s lunch.

The Nintendo Switch debuted at $299 in 2017 — around $380 in today’s money — and the OLED version arrived at $349 in 2021. A year later, Valve’s Steam Deck debuted at $399. But today, the only Windows handheld gaming PC I can recommend costs $799, roughly twice the price of an entry-level Deck, and most Windows handhelds have started at $600 and up. High-end options are great, but the space may remain niche without low-end options, too.

Only the least expensive model of Lenovo’s SteamOS variant of the Legion Go S will lower that bar to $499 this May. And all of those prices are still more than Sony or Microsoft charges for a TV console with far more performance, and likely more than Nintendo will charge for the Switch 2.

I’m not sure what *exactly* PC makers would need to do to challenge the Switch on price, but it’s likely not simple. Valve CEO Gabe Newell said it was “painful” but “critical” to launch the Steam Deck at $399, hinting that the company may have followed the razor-and-blades business model where console makers initially sell hardware at a loss, then make the money back as people buy games. If so, that’s a tough act to follow, as no other PC maker controls the world’s largest PC games store and can afford to subsidize a handheld that way.

But not every console has been a loss leader: Nintendo reportedly never sold the Switch at a loss, and Sony stopped selling the PS5 at a loss less than a year after its debut. So it’s possible to cut prices with the right bill of materials and economies of scale. Lenovo explicitly told me it worked with AMD on the Z2 Go chip to help lower the Legion Go S’s price, for example.

To compete with Nintendo, a company like Microsoft or Valve or even Sony needs to lead the charge, securing the components and offering the right operating system for dozens of true Switch competitors Imagine dozens of portable Xboxes or PlayStations or Steam Machines, instead of each PC maker marching to the beat of their own drum.

I think it’s time for an industry-wide push on handheld gaming. It might be the future of gaming, period. There’s too much at stake to tackle it one half-baked Windows handheld at a time.

https://www.theverge.com/24351383/handheld-pcs-challenge-switch-2-editorial