Mobile phone games disappoint
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DESPITE enthusiasm for the potential of game playing on mobile phones, commercial sales of mobile-game software and hardware have been lower than expected.

Nokia says sales of its N-Gage game console and phone combo have been in the lower quartile of the device's anticipated performance.

Industry analysts cite cultural differences between Japan, where mobile game playing is popular, and the rest of the world, and differences in mobile-phone use in Europe compared with the US and Australia.

Java developer Michael Yuan says the games market will continue to grow as technology improves.

He believes Nokia's new N-Gage and subsequent devices will make games increasingly more appealing, with 3D full colour graphics and wireless multiplayer capabilities.

He says since the mobile phone has become the most commonly carried object after keys and wallets, the user base is there and all that remains is for developers to produce games people want to play.

Mobile gaming guru Thomas Puha, of Finland, says part of the problem with mobile games is that developers have a console mentality.

He says many games are little more than cut-down versions of titles seen on PlayStation 2, or clones of early PC games.

"Cell phones are mass-market items and the cell-phone mass market consists of casual gamers, not hardcore gamers," he says.

Puha believes most mobile users are content with simple games such as Snake, offered free on most Nokia handsets and therefore, uptake of more sophisticated
titles such as Pandemonium, a 3D-action game for N-Gage, has been slower than expected.

"But with the advent of more sophisticated phones and services, users will slowly but surely get into more complex games and features," he says.

He believes the average mobile multiplayer game will involve more SMS texting than Quake-style death-match combat.

Yuan believes subscription-based games will be more successful than stand-alone titles, because users will want to take advantage of new features on mobile networks, such as the capabilities of 3G.

He says a successful game must be easy to learn, able to be interrupted if the phone suddenly receives a call, and include rich social interactions between players rather than a focus on blood and gore.

End users, such as the members of the Wireless Gaming Review forums (www.wgamer.com) believe part of the problem with mobile games is that companies have to make each one compatible with a wide range of very different devices.

They complain that games cater for the lowest common denominator, and rarely take advantage of the hardware in more advanced phones.

Wireless Gaming Review recently launched the Mobie Awards, which gave awards to mobile games in lightweight and unlimited categories.

Lightweight games are designed to run on any java-enabled phone and unlimited games run on more advanced hardware such as the Nokia N-Gage.

But readers complained that it was unfair of the site to compare games running on such a wide variety of different phones.
Some not-too-cerebral offerings

FINDING a good game for your mobile phone might be hard work, so here are three games that have received widespread acclaim online.

Nightmare Creatures
Platform: J2ME
Web: www.gameloft.com

This side-scrolling beat-em-up pits the player against a host of unpleasant creatures from beyond the grave. Zombies, gargoyles and dragons all make an appearance, and at the end of each level the player must face an enormous boss creature. Not too cerebral perhaps, but excellent graphics show off the capabilities of today's top phones.

Lemonade Tycoon
Platform: BREW
Web: www.hexacto.com/game—lemonade.php

If you're stuck in traffic in your limo on the way to your next hostile takeover, why not keep your skills honed with this little business simulator? Start on a street corner with a tiny stand, mix up a batch of lemonade to your own secret recipe, and watch the 10c pieces roll in. Can you make it to the big leagues and sell your soda at a major sporting event?

EverQuest: Hero's Call
Platform: BREW
Web: heroscall.station.sony.com

EverQuest is the world's most popular massively multiplayer online game, and applications exist for PDA to help players track their characters while away from the PC. Hero's Call is a single-player adventure that includes everything you've come to expect from an RPG — characters, lots of items, and plenty of side quests.