

From Monochrome to 3D - The Evolution of Nintendo's Handheld

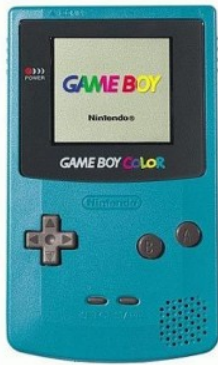
One of the most memorable Christmases I had growing up was when I got the original Game Boy. This was the very first portable gaming system I ever owned; probably one of the first handhelds *anyone* has ever owned! It was the first of its kind; aside from the countless variations of the Game & Watch released during the time. The Game Boy is a grey, brick-shaped handheld 8-bit Nintendo system; sporting a dim monochrome screen that required a light in order to play, and sucked up battery life like a Metroid on an unsuspecting space pirate. This however didn't phase anyone at the time, it was still incredibly desirable which sold over 60 million units! I remember it being one of the most brought to school toys too; more than the calculator! When in school, I kept mine in my bag all day even though there were only short instances where I was able to turn it on and play through a level or two of Mario. Didn't want to over do it, last thing I wanted was the teacher to take it away.

Countless game cartridges were released for this system, a lot of which are still notable to this day! Such as Mario Land, Mega Man: Dr. Wily's Revenge, Metroid II, Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle, and Zelda: Link's Awakening. Up until around 2005 you could still acquire newer systems which still supported these old games; this in itself proved its lasting success.

Over the next 20+ years Nintendo would release multiple upgrades to the system, and become the main publisher to pioneer this new format into the future. Though I will not get to detailed with *all* the releases, I'm going to highlight some of the most eventful.

Game Boy Color
98' / Sold: 50+ Million units

Released: Nov



The Game Boy Color was the next logical step for Nintendo, to start producing handheld games in **color** (slow clap).

This system was slightly smaller than the original and came in multicolor and transparent casings. It wasn't that big of a upgrade from the classic as it still had no backlight, required batteries and was graphically the same exact system; just with some added benefits. One of the features given to the player was the ability to choose a color palette before playing a game. This was really cool when using original Game Boy carts, though the color selection it gave ended up looking atrocious at times. Even if it were to defeat the purpose, it was a good thing you would have the option of selecting black & white.

This system was the first to bring the much loved Pokemon franchise to the gaming world, as well as its own notable color enhanced titles.

Game Boy Advance
Million units (all series)

Released: Jun 01' / Sold: 80+



The Game Boy Advance was definitely an improvement over the 8-bit world surrounding early Nintendo and the multitude of Game Boy models released at the time. It sported a 32-bit processor which simulated the visual style and sound of the Super Nintendo. Like the previous system this offered backwards compatibility which allowed you to pick up copies of older games that were released on the Color, or even a decade before hand for the Classic. Aside from the graphics and its oval shape, it had added "L" and "R" buttons, much like the Super Nintendo's.



The Game Boy Advance SP was a follow-up enchantment which had some long awaited improvements, such as a more portable protective clamshell case with rechargeable ion battery and illuminating side lighting for the screen. Though just before the Advance gave way to its predecessor, the SP had once last upgrade which included a brighter backlit screen; much like the more prominent tech used today.

This was a pretty popular system, especially for retro gamers and one of my personal favorites as well! Nintendo released multiple Super Nintendo ports along with the already massive catalog of great titles. It was also the first portable Nintendo system that supported Sega releases such as Sonic Advance.

Nintendo DS Million units (all series)

Released: Dec 04' / Sold: 150+



The DS was the first big change Nintendo made to their handhelds and the first to not bear the "Game Boy" moniker. The selling factor: it offered two screens; one of which was a touch sensitive. Though this appeared to be a strange gimmick at first, it proved its worth my opening up possibilities in the gaming world offering unique interactive play styles which differed from the norm. Taking its design cues from the SP, it too had a protective clamshell design; though bulky and not really pocket-friendly. This was the first portable system that didn't offer complete backwards compatibility with original Game Boy and Color titles, only Advance. This system boasts one of the largest collection of games on the market including some Nintendo 64 re-releases. Truly a creative shift for Nintendo's handheld, and was the best selling to date!

**Nintendo 3DS
(as of 3rd quarter 12')**

Released: Mar 11' / Sold: 20+ Million units



Last on my list here is the most recent upgrade to the DS console, the 3DS. This system is a mash-up of all the previous DS models, you can play wirelessly with other players and download content online much like its predecessor the Nintendo DSi. Offering improved graphics, a slimmer physique, and a street-pass function; allowing you to trade information and play mini games with other people just by passing them. Of course, the main selling factor is the glasses free 3D screen. Personally I had been dreaming of such a gaming system since I was little, and though it had a weak launch I am stoked to see how this evolves over time.

From Game Boy to the 3DS, many improvements have been made to handheld systems, and for almost 30 years Nintendo has come a long way as well! They have stayed true to their formula and history, focusing on quality games providing an everlasting impression on young and old gamers alike.

Do you have a favorite classic Nintendo handheld? Or perhaps a nostalgic Holiday memory about a favorite system? Sound off in the comments.

-Justin