

The Marketing Role of Demo Discs in the SCEE Territory

How demo discs are used by SCEE

SCEE (Sony Computer Entertainment Europe) uses demo discs for two main purposes; in-box demos packed with hardware and software, and magazine cover-mounts.

In-box demo discs

In Europe, shops often sell consoles without an accompanying game. If the purchaser does not also buy a game, as usually happens if the console is a Christmas or birthday present, the in-box demo disc is probably the first disc the user has for his new console.

This disc, called Demo 1 (a sample is enclosed in this information pack), is a powerful marketing tool. It prevents the 'batteries not included' disappointment of the user. It ensures that a good selection of games is promoted immediately. It captures user data by means of a registration card packed in the disc case.

Software in-box demo discs are used in the same way to promote important titles. The bonus disc also helps stimulate sales of the titles which contain it. This approach was used very successfully in Japan by Square with the release of Tobal No. 1 in 1996, which contained a demo disc of Final Fantasy 7.

Magazine cover-mount demo discs

SCEE sponsors the publication of Official PlayStation magazines in the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Italy, Benelux/Holland and Australia.

In Europe, most magazines are sold through retail, not by subscription, and must compete on the shelves with many other titles. Cover-mounted gifts are an important way of increasing a magazine's sales appeal.

SCEE therefore produces a cover-mount demo disc, with 4 to 5 playable demos, for each issue. As a result of this, the Official magazine is the leading title amongst several competing PlayStation magazines in each country. In the UK, the Official PlayStation magazine sells more copies than its next 2 rivals combined, despite being over 67% more expensive than either.

The 'Official' titles have a very wide distribution in Europe, reaching an ABC guaranteed readership of over 370,000 readers each month, with an estimated 'pass-on' readership of more than 1,300,000. This is due largely to the availability of the cover-mounted demo disc.

Magazine readers are keen players. They have money, and are always searching for the best title to spend it on. As early purchasers of new games, they spearhead sales. Through personal recommendation they can start a cascade effect that builds sales rapidly.

Since Sega does not produce a monthly demo disc for Saturn magazines, and it is impossible for Nintendo to produce demo cartridges, the cover-mounted demo disc has been an important part of the marketing effort for the PlayStation platform. SCEE feels that it has contributed greatly to the success of the PlayStation platform in Europe.

Distribution of European demo discs

Here are the statistics for the demo discs SCEE currently produces.

Magazine title	Country	Frequency	Print run
Official PlayStation Magazine	UK	Monthly	185,000+ copies
Official PlayStation Magazine	Australia	Monthly	30,000+ copies
PlayStation Magazine	Italy	Monthly	25,000+ copies
PlayStation Magazine	Greece	Monthly	15,000+ copies
Offizielle PlayStation Magazin	Germany	Monthly	75,000+ copies
PlayStation Magazine	France	Monthly	100,000+ copies
PlayStation Magazine	Holland/Benelux	Bi-monthly	15,000 copies
PlayStation Magazine	Spain	Bi-monthly	25,000 copies (estimated)

Demo 1 (in-box with hardware)	Europe/Australia Quarterly	250,000+ copies
(Pillars	Europe/Australia Irregular	250,000+ copies)
Inside Track	Europe/Australia Twice yearly	500,000+ copies (Sent to
all registered PlayStation owners)		

In total we manufacture and distribute more than 500,000 demo discs per month to the millions of PlayStation owners in the SCEE territory.

Why demos are important to publishers

Playable demos are the most convincing way to show off a new title. By distributing your demo on cover-mounted discs, you reach an audience of many hundreds of thousands of players. SCEE provides this service to publishers as a matter of course.

A playable demo should be an integral part of your game's marketing plan from Day 1 of development.

How demo discs are produced

All European demo discs are produced in the London office by the Special Projects department, put through the usual QA and Approvals process, then manufactured at the DADC factory in Austria. All these processes are handled independently of the game publisher, who only needs to supply a demo segment.

SCEE's Special Projects department was set up specifically to handle demo disc development. By devoting an entire department to this activity, SCEE provides a rapid and efficient service, capable of handling a variety of disc projects to tight deadlines. Apart from the discs produced regularly for cover-mounting, for in-box distribution with hardware and software, we also make demo discs for other special purposes. The Prince's Trust disc is an example.

Special Projects also maintains and extends the demo shell code, bootstrap and menu system within which demo segments are incorporated.

Personnel of the department

1 Producer
3 Artists
2 Programmers

Technical requirements for a European demo

These are similar to the requirements for a playable demo for the SCEI or SCEA demo discs. Various minor differences are covered in detail in the Technical Specification for European Demo Disc, on the accompanying floppy disk in Japanese and English. The main points from this document are presented in the Technical Notes on European Demos in this pack.

Costs of producing a demo segment

There is no charge for inclusion on any of the magazine cover mounts or the other demo discs. The only cost to your company is the extra time taken to prepare a demo segment to the SCEE technical specifications. If scheduled in the game's design process, this is a tiny amount of time, often less than a week for a single programmer.

Suggested types of demos

1. Video.

This is a short clip of gameplay, recorded to betacam tape, then converted to PlayStation format (MDEC or Stream). This can be streamed or played directly from the demo CD.

2. Rolling demo.

This is a non-playable version of the game, running in 'attract' or demo mode. This is more effective as it demonstrated the real-time performance of the game.

3. Playable demo.

This is a limited version of the actual game and should include a demo mode as well as full playability. It is important to make sure the amount of game offered is enough to 'hook' the player, without offering so much that he does not need to buy the complete version. For example, the Tekken 2 demo allows the user to select only 2 out of the 10 starting characters, and play only one fight before it quits.

Are there too many demos available?

Some publishers are worried that too many demos are available to users, so that they do not need to buy actual games. Though there is no evidence of this in the PlayStation market, some publishers argue it has already happened in the PC software market. However, it's different with the PlayStation, for the following reasons:

1. Only the SCEE official magazines, licensed by SCEE, carry a demo disc, so there is no risk of flooding the market with a dozen discs a month.
2. All demo discs are produced and published by SCEE. We control the quantity and quality of the demos published. We are careful not to release too many demos or demos which have too much gameplay in them.
3. Our producers and account managers give close guidance to publishers concerning what makes a good demo. This prevents publishers from giving away too much of their new game.
4. There is no danger of demo versions being 'cracked' by pirates, as they are not disabled versions of the complete game.

In contrast, the PC market is wide open and every magazine carries a disc each month. Individual game publishers are responsible for the amount of game play in their demos. There is also the problem of demos and beta versions being cracked and pirated, as happened to Quake in 1996.

How to schedule your game for a demo disc

First, contact your producer or account manager to tell them what you want to do, and make sure time is allocated in the development schedule. Please note, it will take SCEE Special Projects between 8 and 12 weeks from receiving your demo to its appearance on the shelves in shops.

Second, make sure that the programmers know that the demo segment must conform to the Technical Specification for European Demo Disc. This is available in English and Japanese on the accompanying floppy disk, which also contains the programming code your developers will need. The most important points can be found in the accompanying **Technical Introduction to Producing European Demos** (in Japanese). Further help is available from the SCEE Developer Support department, available by email ... ps_developer@interactive.sony.com

Third, contact Richard Milner, producer of special projects, for schedules of forthcoming demo discs. The best time to release a demo is just before the game will be released, and at the same time as the magazines carry their reviews of the new game. Remember once again to allow 8 to 12 weeks for production and distribution of the demo disc.

Fourth, once you're happy with your demo segment, send it on a PC format CD-ROM to Richard Milner at SCEE, Waverley House in London.

Contact details for help with european demo discs

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Time differences and other problems

Please note that Japanese time is 8 or 9 hours ahead of UK time. It's therefore convenient to use email and fax rather than telephone. Please remember that Japanese text may be corrupted and unreadable by email. You should therefore send Romaji if you write in Japanese.

This document was written by Richard Milner, Producer of Special Projects, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Updated 20th February 1997.