

By August 2006, Games Editor

Xbox Live's Marketplace Future Exposed

Once content goes thin, XBL Marketplace will feature consumables

With Microsoft, what you see is always just the tip of the iceberg, and Gamefest 2006 recently released information should make no exception. The heat was on regarding the past, present and future of Xbox Live and its incredibly prolific XBL Marketplace feature. In order to maximize the impact of add-on content, Microsoft stated it was critical that game publishers release new content while gamers are still playing the title, within a suggested period between 60 and 90 days after release. Recent games like Chromehounds and Dead Rising saw free content being released days after the official game launch and Oblivion had several months of steadily streamed, paid, content available to the Marketplace. Since producers rarely cease support once the content packs are being developed no more, this situation raises a legitimate question: What will the XBL Marketplace bring to the table in order to maintain its sales' integrity? Microsoft mentioned a new kind of micro transaction, which they are calling "consumables." These purchases involve items you can buy over and over again. Let's say one particular game sells 100g for a nominal fee on XBL. The player would then be able to re-buy that 100g sum as many times as needed, provided he pays for the service. The "consumables" tech will be included in this fall's release of the SDK. With over 80 percent of Xbox Live members downloading content from XBL Marketplace, you can tell it's going to get big right away. Microsoft plans on allowing players free access to traders placed directly within video games. Let's say there is a RPG vendor selling a rare item, item also available on the XBL Marketplace. Players would then be able to add the item to a checkout cart and later return to the Marketplace to finalize the purchase. The commercial applications are undeniable, yet it basically means this is an extension of the "consumables" department, as players can buy in-game items for real world currency, all within online (read multiplayer) games. Microsoft walks a fine line, as an entertainment provider is at risk of falling over to the side of petty merchants, with no respect for the game.