

Ken Kutaragi

Introduction

Ken Kutaragi is the former chairman and group CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment and is now the current president and CEO of Cyber AI entertainment. He is well known and praised as “The father of the PlayStation” after designing the original PlayStation, PlayStation 2, PSP (PlayStation portable) and PlayStation 3. Kutaragi also designed the sound processor for Nintendo’s Super SNES and the VLSI chip for the original PlayStation.

Early Life

Ken Kutaragi was born on the 2nd of August, 1950 in Tokyo, Japan. Kutaragi’s love for electronics began at a young age where he would often take apart toys to see how they worked internally. He was a straight A student in school and carried on his passion for electronics by studying at the University of Electro-Communications in Tokyo. Kutaragi graduated with an electronics degree and immediately after, he started working for Sony in their digital research labs.

The PlayStation

Kutaragi began working for Sony in 1975. In the early 80’s, Nintendo released their gaming console, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). He saw the potential of the gaming industry and was interested in designing a new console. However, Sony’s executives were not interested in the gaming industry at the time. A few years later, Nintendo were recruiting engineers to build a sound chip for their new console, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES). Although he was working for Sony, Kutaragi agreed to work on this project without telling anyone. He managed to design and build the chip which was used in the SNES. Eventually, Sony’s executives found out and were furious but with the help of Norio Ohga, the CEO of Sony at the time, he was able to

keep his job. In 1990, Sony formed a partnership with Nintendo to build a new home video game system. They were going to build a console that would be compatible with both SNES roms and new games in a disk format. However, the partnership didn't work out due to licensing disagreements. After the failed partnership with Nintendo, Sony decided to continue working and create their own gaming console which turned out to be the PlayStation.

In 1991, Kutaragi was named manager of the PlayStation group and three years later, they released the first PlayStation. This was a huge turning point in Kutaragi's career and it put his name high up in the ranks at Sony. When the PlayStation went on market, it became an instant hit and soon enough it was the world's most popular gaming console. By the end of the 1990's it was generating almost half of Sony's profit. After the huge success of the PlayStation, Kutaragi had plans to create a successor gaming console, the PlayStation 2. It was completely designed from scratch, using new and improved components. In 1999, Sony announced the PlayStation 2 and in the same year, Kutaragi was named president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment. The next year, the PlayStation 2 was released and was selling very well.

However, Sony found it hard to mass produce them as the cost was much higher than the original PlayStation and in the first year of its release, the company was losing money. Rumours began to spread around about the potential sacking of Kutaragi because of this. As more games came out for the PlayStation 2, sales began to skyrocket and his position in the company was redeemed. Just like its predecessor, the PlayStation 2 became the most famous gaming console around the world and within a few years of its release, it was generating over half of Sony's profit. After designing two of the best gaming consoles, Kutaragi was not finished. His next design was something different and extraordinary. He was working on a high-quality handheld gaming console, the PlayStation Portable (PSP). The PSP was designed to use flash memory and a new technology, Universal Media Disc (UMD) discs, which are now discontinued. It was announced in 2003 and was released the following year. The PSP was the first real contender of the

Nintendo DS. Sales began to rise slowly and the PSP became a prominent handheld gaming device. Continuing on with his success, Kutaragi's next project was the PlayStation 3. As technology was advancing at such a high rate, so was the design and implementation of the next PlayStation. It was the first PlayStation to integrate online gaming services through their new service, PlayStation network. It was also the first console to use Blu-ray discs as its primary storage medium. It was announced in 2005 and released in 2006. Initially, the PlayStation 3 had a slow start in the market due to its very high price at \$600. However, sales increased over time, especially with the release of the PlayStation 3 slim model. This console would be Kutaragi's final PlayStation design.

In 2006, he was replaced as President of Sony Computer Entertainment. Kutaragi was then promoted to chairman of SCEI and retained his position as chief executive officer of the group. He retired in 2007 but took up the role of Honorary Chairman of SCEI and in 2011, Kutaragi stepped down as Honorary Chairman, however he remained at Sony as senior technology advisor. He is currently president and CEO of Cyber AI Entertainment, a company he built after leaving Sony.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear to see the remarkable career Ken Kutaragi had at Sony and the impact he made there. He put his desire and passion for electronics into his work and created the best gaming consoles in the world. He took a risk by encouraging Sony to go into the gaming industry and in the end, it paid off. The reason why I chose to do a biography on Ken Kutaragi is because I am a big fan of Sony products, especially the PlayStation. I had all the consoles he designed from the original PlayStation to the PlayStation 3. I played these consoles growing up as a kid and it brought so much joy and entertainment to my childhood years. It was also very interesting to learn how the PlayStation franchise began and the man behind it all.

References

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