

= Sega Channel =

Sega Channel was an online game service developed by Sega for the Genesis video game console , serving as a content delivery system . Launching in December 1994 , Sega Channel was provided to the public by TCI and Time Warner Cable through cable television services by way of coaxial cable . It was a pay to play service , through which customers could access Genesis games online , play game demos , and get cheat codes . Lasting until July 31 , 1998 , Sega Channel operated three years after the release of Sega 's next generation console , the Sega Saturn . Though criticized for its poorly timed launch and high subscription fee , Sega Channel has been praised for its innovations in downloadable content and impact on online services for video games .

= History =

Released in Japan as the Mega Drive in 1988 , North America in 1989 , and Europe and other regions as the Mega Drive in 1990 , the Sega Genesis was Sega 's entry into the 16 @-@ bit era of video game consoles . In 1990 , Sega started their first Internet @-@ based service for the console , Sega Meganet , in Japan . Operating through a cartridge and a peripheral called the " Mega Modem " , this system allowed Mega Drive owners to play seventeen games online . A North American version of this system , dubbed " Tele @-@ Genesis " , was announced but never released . Another phone @-@ based system , the Mega Anser , turned the Japanese Mega Drive into an online banking terminal . Due to Meganet 's low number of titles , prohibitively high price , and the Mega Drive 's lack of success in Japan , the system proved to be a commercial failure . By 1992 , the Mega Modem peripheral could be found in bargain bins at a reduced price , and a remodeled version of the console released in 1993 removed the EXT 9 @-@ pin port altogether , preventing the newer model from being connected to the Meganet service .

In April 1993 , Sega announced the Sega Channel service , which would utilize cable television services to deliver content . National testing in the United States for the service began in June , and deployment across the United States began in December , with a complete release in North America in 1994 . By June 1994 , Sega Channel had gained a total of 21 cable companies signed up to carry the service . Fees in the United States for the service varied depending on location , but were approximately US \$ 15 monthly , plus a \$ 25 activation fee , which included the adapter . During the planning stages of the service , Sega looked to capitalize on the rental market , which had seen some success with the Sega CD being rented through Blockbuster , Inc . , and was looking to base the service 's offering of games and demos to help sell more cartridges .

In early 1995 , Sega CEO Hayao Nakayama decided to end development on the Sega Genesis and its add @-@ ons , the Sega CD and Sega 32X . This decision was made to support the Sega Saturn , which had been released in Japan already . This placed the release of the Sega Channel right at the height of the Genesis ' decline from the market . At its peak , Sega Channel had over 250 @,@ 000 subscribers , but by 1997 , the number of subscribers had dropped to 230 @,@ 000 , two years after Nakayama made the decision to shift focus from the Genesis to the Saturn . Though Sega looked at options to bring the service to PCs , the service was eventually discontinued by July 31 , 1998 .

= Technical aspects and specifications =

After making the initial purchase and paying the activation fee , Genesis owners would receive an adapter that would be inserted into the cartridge slot of the console . The adapter connected the console to a cable television wire , doing so by the use of a coaxial cable output in the rear of the cartridge . Starting up a Genesis console with an active Sega Channel adapter installed would prompt for the service 's main menu to be loaded , which was a process that took approximately 30 seconds . From there , gamers could access the content they wished to play and download it into their system , which could take up to a few minutes per game . This data would be downloaded into the adaptor 's on @-@ board 4 MB RAM , and would be erased when the system was powered off .

Programming and transmission of the Sega Channel 's monthly services started with a production team at Sega , which would put together content every month and load it onto a CD @-@ ROM . It was then sent to a satellite station , located in Denver , Colorado . From the station , the signal was transmitted via a Galaxy 7 satellite , which uploaded at 1 @.@ 435 GHz and downloaded at 1 @.@ 1 GHz , to the local cable providers . In Canada and across South America and Europe , however , the satellite transmission stage was bypassed altogether in favor of direct uploads of the Sega Channel CD @-@ ROM via a cable television headend . In order for the signal to function properly , it had to be clear of noise in order to prevent download interruptions . To ensure no issues , cable providers had to " clean " their broadcast signal .

= = Game library = =

The Sega Channel service (also known as " Sega On The Line ") hosted up to 50 Genesis games at any one time . Titles would rotate monthly ; however , some updates happened on a weekly basis . Games for the service included titles developed by Sega , such as Sonic & Knuckles , Eternal Champions , and Space Harrier II ; as well as titles developed by licensees of Sega , such as Bubsy 2 and Aladdin . Some of these games had reduced content compared to their cartridge release so that they could fit the adapter 's memory , such as Super Street Fighter II . Sega Channel also hosted games in some regions that would not receive a cartridge release , such as Pulsemann , Mega Man : The Wily Wars , and Alien Soldier , which were hosted on the service in North America . The service also offered demos of upcoming games , such as Primal Rage . Though games and demos rotated on a regular basis , categories into which games were placed remained static and did not change . With parental controls in mind , all games for the service received a rating from the Videogame Rating Council . The service also contained a lockout system which would allow parents to set a passcode in order to access mature rated content .

In addition to games and demos , Sega Channel also hosted other features . Cheat codes were directly accessible from the network , as well as game hints . The service also hosted contests , such as a promotion with Electronic Arts ' Triple Play ' 96 , and a 1995 event where players who completed Primal Rage during a brief 24 @-@ hour period where the full game was accessible were given a phone number to call , making them eligible to win prizes .

= = Reception and legacy = =

During its lifetime , Sega Channel won one of Popular Science 's " Best of What 's New " award for the year 1994 . Likewise , in August 1995 , a survey conducted by Sports Illustrated found that children between 9 and 13 years old were five times more likely to subscribe to Sega Channel than to purchase a Sega Saturn or the upcoming Nintendo 64 or PlayStation . The service would go on to garner as many as 250 @,@ 000 subscribers ; however , Sega had anticipated having over one million subscribers by the end of its first year , and had made the service available to over 20 million households .

Retrospective reception of Sega Channel praises its innovation and role in the development of online gaming , but criticizes its high subscription fees and timing into the market . IGN writer Adam Redsell notes how Sega Channel caused many cable companies to clean their broadcast signal and its role in the development of high @-@ speed internet , stating " ... the very fact that you ? re enjoying broadband internet right now could well be thanks to SEGA . " Levi Buchanan , also writing for IGN , credits Sega Channel with its role in the development of modern gaming and content delivery services , such as Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network , stating " SEGA and the entire industry learned important lessons from the SEGA Channel . SEGA was still committed to the idea of downloads and online , as evidenced by the Dreamcast 's SegaNet ... You can also see the DNA of early services like the SEGA Channel in modern portals like XBLA and PSN , where demos are now a staple . " The staff of UGO Networks also credits Sega Channel with being an important step in the development of both services .

Ken Horowitz of Sega @-@ 16 criticizes Sega 's poor timing of the launch of Sega Channel and the

subscription 's high price . According to Horowitz , " Who would spend \$ 13 a month to play games for a dying system ? This horrendous blunder (one of many by [Sega Enterprises]) caused retailers to dump their inventory of systems , thereby sealing the fate of the Sega Channel once and for all . " Buchanan echoes the same sentiments , stating , " Perhaps if the SEGA Channel had been released earlier in the console 's lifecycle ? the Genesis launched in 1989 in America ? things might have turned out differently . After all , the service did gain notice for its advancement of gaming and technology . " UGO also notes the potential Sega Channel could have had with some more development time in the field of competitive multiplayer , stating , " If the Sega Channel had come a little earlier in the life of the Genesis it would have seen much more exposure , and maybe online play would have been feasible for games that could have been developed directly for the service . "