

Steam Box(es) at CES

Written by Marco Attard
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Half Life and online game merchant Steam developer Valve confirms its long rumoured "Steam Box" hardware plans with Piston, a home theatre PC (HTPC) from mini-PC maker Xi3.



Seen in prototype form at CES 2013, according to Xi3 the Valve-sponsored Piston is "designed specifically to support both Steam and its Big Picture mode for residential and LAN party computer gaming on larger HD screens."

The PC itself is based on Xi3's high-end offering, the X7A, and packs up to a 3.2GHz quad-core processor, 8GB RAM and 1TB of SSD storage, with a full complement of x8 USB slots (four 2.0, four 3.0), x4 eSATA slots, x2 Mini DisplayPorts and HDMI port, all within a modular design.

The OS of choice is Linux, together with Valve's Steam games marketplace.

However Valve's hardware ambitions stretch beyond a single HTPC-- in a rare interview with The Verge, head honcho Gabe Newell reveals his company is working in-house on a Steam Box, complete with Linux-based backend and custom controller incorporating biometric feedback. And while Newell describes Windows 8 as a *"giant sadness,"* he promises it should not be difficult to install Windows on the machine.

Equally interesting is how the Steam Box will act as a server, handling multiple monitors through a next-generation (post-Kepler) GPU able to serve up to x8 simultaneous game calls.

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The company also has ambitions for mobile devices, with "Bigfoot" and "Littlefoot" Steam Box plans.

PCs as the next gaming console (read living room entertainment hub) pushed by one of the biggest names in the industry? Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft might have to start worrying a bit...

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