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SEMICONDUCTORS: November 22, 1999

Do You Voodoo Like I Do?

By Arik Hesseldahl

Las Vegas -- 3dfx Interactive Inc. has launched the first implementation of its Voodoo Scalable Architecture in its new **Voodoo 4** and 5 graphics add-in boards, expected to ship in March.

Central to the new boards is the company's **VSA 100** chip, formerly assigned the code name "Napalm," which the company says can scale up to as many as 32 chips per system using its own scan-line interleaving techniques. The company said the part enables high fill rates that are critical to delivering the kinds of graphics performance demanded by PC gamers. The company also said boards based on the part can deliver graphics at fill rates ranging from 333 megapixels per second to 1.47 gigapixels per second, using 16Mbytes to 128Mbytes of video memory and one to four processors per board.

Peter Wicher, director of product marketing at 3dfx, said the company is still making its chips on a 0.25-micron process, but has added a sixth layer of metal to its parts. Its fab partner is Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp.



The architecture incorporates industry standard 3D features including 32-bit RGBA rendering, 24-bit depth-buffer (Z and W), 8-bit stencil rendering, DXTC and FXT1 texture compression support, 32-bit textures, 2,048 x 2,048 texture size support and advanced texture and color combine capabilities. Additional support is provided for a 128-bit 2D engine, DVD hardware assist and AGP 4x and PCI, the company said. The VSA-100 is designed for optimal performance on current and future CPUs from Intel Corp. and Advanced Micro Devices Inc.

3dfx Voodoo 4 and 5 graphics add-in boards

Once king of the graphics hill, 3dfx has been struggling of late and has seen some of its market share in the graphics add-in board market fall off in recent months. The company in August reported a loss of \$11.6 million on revenue of \$104.8 million. Rival Nvidia Corp. reported a fivefold increase of revenues for the same period that 3dfx reported the loss.

Scott Hudson, PC technology analyst with Cahners In-Stat Group, said the gaming community is a finicky bunch and their loyalty is difficult to hold.

Voodoo 4 will have a single chip on the board, while the higher end **Voodoo 5** family will come in two- and four-chip configurations, the company said.

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