

Peripheral Compatible

Like the consoles that are featured in the System Compatible section, the consoles listed here are compatible with software made for other systems. However, in this section, the consoles listed are compatible with games from an earlier system by the same manufacturer.

Atari 5200: Cartridge Adapter

The 5200 Cartridge Adapter, which allowed the Atari 5200 to play all of the 2600-compatible games, appeared to be an afterthought from Atari. In fact, one of the initial major gripes about the 5200 (in addition to its horrific controllers) was that the system wasn't compatible with its earlier sibling.

Surprisingly, the designers of the 5200 had originally wanted the supersystem to be compatible with the 2600. However, this idea was abruptly discarded when the decision was made to base the 5200 on the Atari 400/800 line of computers. The computers were not compatible with the 2600, so the resulting 5200 wasn't either. When the Colecovision was released with its Expansion Module 1, Atari executives realized that for the 5200 to be competitive, it too had to be compatible with the 2600.

The result was the Cartridge Adapter, which unfortunately could not work with all 5200s. Instead of using the 5200's expansion port, the Cartridge Adapter was designed to stick awkwardly into the console's cartridge port. This design could be used only on newer 5200s, which had only two joystick ports. When it was discovered that the older 5200s were incompatible with the device that would make the system 2600-compatible, Atari's first reaction was to scrap all the remaining four-port models that it still had in its inventory. Fortunately, one Atari engineer figured out a relatively easy way for Atari to modify the four-port consoles. Atari also provided free modifications to anyone who purchased a four-port 5200.

When Atari announced the 7800 in 1984, one of the planned peripherals was an adapter that would give the 5200 the ability to play 7800 games. However, Atari axed the 5200 soon after the 7800's announcement, so the promised adapter never appeared.

Sega Genesis: Power Base Converter

The Sega Master System (SMS) had not been a popular system in Japan nor the United States. Although it was technologically superior to the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), the NES, which had rejuvenated the stagnant US video game industry, was just too popular to contend with. Despite its lack of popularity, Sega thought highly enough of the 8-bit machine that it made its 16-bit Genesis backward compatible with it. Well, sort of.

The Genesis actually contained three processors. The main CPU was contained in the 68000 chip. There was also a Video Display Processor, which was exclusively dedicated to, as its name implies, the graphics. Finally, there was a Z80 chip that was used for generating sound. The Z80 just happened to be the processor that was used in the SMS.

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Genesis with Power
Base Converter

When the Power Base Converter was inserted into the cartridge slot of the Genesis, it essentially turned off the 68000 and forced the Z80 to become the main CPU. The Power Base Converter provided inputs for both cartridges and Sega Cards.

Surprisingly, the Power Base Converter is not compatible with the Genesis 2 nor Genesis 3, both of which are newer and smaller versions of the Genesis. A Power Base Converter for the Genesis 2 was manufactured, but it was sold only in Europe, presumably because the SMS's popularity lasted a bit longer in Europe than it did in the United States.

Sega Game Gear: Master Gear Converter

Sega's first entry in the handheld gaming arena was the Game Gear, an 8-bit color unit that resembled Atari's Lynx. The Game Gear used a Z80 processor, which was the same as the SMS's. Theoretically, the cartridges for the SMS could play on the Game Gear if they could fit inside. However, Sega specifically made the handheld device incompatible with the SMS because of the display.

SMS games were designed to play on televisions with large screens (13 inches and above). If these games were played on the Game Gear, many of the elements that would appear small on a television would be microscopic on the Game Gear's tiny 3.2-inch screen. And if text appeared in any games, like in Monopoly, it would be rendered unreadable on the Game Gear. Also preventing SMS games from being played on the Game Gear was the difference in the graphics processors that the systems used. The SMS could display 128 colors, and the Game Gear could display only 32.

So even though the Game Gear could theoretically play the SMS games, it didn't make any sense for it to do so. Instead, Sega went ahead and made new games for the Game Gear, ones that could play on the tiny screen without causing much eyestrain. Eventually, a library of approximately 250 games was released.

Despite the large number of games available for the Game Gear, Sega executives apparently thought it wasn't enough. The Game Gear was competing against the Game Boy, which had hundreds of games. Since the SMS was technically compatible with the Game Gear, the Sega brass decided that by allowing the SMS games to play on the Game Gear, it could add roughly another 120 titles to the Game Gear's roster.

But how could Sega do this when the SMS cartridges couldn't possibly fit into the Game Gear's cartridge slot? Hence, the birth of the Master Gear Converter. The Master Gear Converter plugged into the Game Gear, just like any standard cartridge. However, the Master Gear Converter also had a cartridge slot that accepted the larger SMS cartridges. Once a cartridge was inserted into a Master Gear Converter that was plugged into the Game Gear, the handheld machine treated the SMS cartridge as if it were one of its own.

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