



## Booming games industry is job heaven

The game's afoot in Vancouver

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Vancouver's growing status as a hub of gaming technology spells good news for job seekers.

And the job openings in demand in this field go beyond animators and computer programmers, although if that is your specialty, you're certainly in the right place.

"If you're looking for a job, the growth is astounding," said Danielle Michael, vice-president of business development at Vancouver's Radical Entertainment. "There are lots of companies to choose from, there are lots of jobs"

Speaking at a B.C. Technology Industry Association forum this week on the future of gaming, Michael and others in Vancouver's burgeoning gaming field had nothing but optimism for the future of the sector here.

And it bodes well for students studying in animation and related fields.

Asked by an audience member why Radical wasn't very interested in B.C. Institute of Technology grads, Michael said just the opposite is the case.

"Radical is the largest hirer of BCIT grads in terms of its animation program," she said. "We have three staff members who teach at BCIT and we do tons of internships.

"Bring it on, we love you guys."

Michael said as the industry grows and matures, so do its staffing needs.

"The games industry is still in its infancy," she said. "Developers are not longer 18-year-olds in a garage.

"They are 30-year-olds, 40-year-olds and they have different needs."

Companies that could once manage with only animators and programmers are finding their skills requirements are broadening to include a range of services, from human resources, to marketing, public-relations, law and others.

"There are all sorts of infrastructure opportunities," said Michael. "PR firms, law firms -- all sorts of suppliers can come in and find a special niche as it grows.

"Specialized professionals --musicians, writers, composers, voice talent -- there is lots of opportunity for specialists to come in and take advantage of this growing industry."

Michael said while the industry is surrounded by hype that puts it in the league of the movie business, the reality is, the gaming sector is still fairly small. The upside is that there is a lot of room to grow and with that, a demand for skilled people to fill the jobs.

"Video game consoles are in one-third of North American households," said Michael. "It is still very much a niche industry.

"The good news is that this industry has everywhere to grow. Video games have not reached the mass market -- there is the potential for them to be as ubiquitous a form of entertainment as television."

Vancouver, already with a critical mass of global leaders in the gaming industry, is poised to take advantage of that growth.

"The industry is growing like a house on fire," said Michael. "Radical continues to hire.

"Tons of game companies in Vancouver continue to hire and continue to grow.

"Vancouver is one of the main hubs for gaming and it may become the main hub."

Frederick Ghahramani, a co-founder and director of AirG Wireless, a company specializing in mobile games and entertainment and one that was well placed to take advantage of the trend to replace voice only wireless with data delivery, is only too happy to recruit new staff for the growing business.

"For AirG, we are going to recruit and train the best people," said Ghahramani, who identified top talent as a key to his company's success. "We're now hiring, we'd love to hire you so please feel free to check our Web site."

AirG's careers listings reflect the diversity of jobs in the sector. While the expected illustrator and graphic designer is on AirG's wish list, there are also spots for quality assurance specialists, customer service representatives, marketing types, wireless developers, integration specialists and systems administrators.

AirG, which started with the founders recognizing the opportunities that would come as carriers shifted to wireless data only a few short years ago, has just closed its fourth year of profitability and already has 86 customers in 37 countries, from the big players like Verizon in the U.S. to MTS in Manitoba.

"It is the number one driver of value added services revenue for customers," said Ghahramani.

Andrew Gregory is the co-founder of Exponentia Communications Corp., a developer of mobile and Internet software that enables such sports organizations as the Toronto Maple Leafs, the NHL and others to translate their digital rights into mobile and Web-based games. The growth of his company only serves to underscore the growing importance of the gaming sector in B.C.

"We more than doubled employees and revenues in the past year, working with sports media and other digital rights owners," said Gregory.

Gregory said he is putting his bets on the mobile gaming market.

"Clearly there is explosive growth in this area," he said.