



BUSINESS BC

Student animators find opportunity with Sprint cell phones

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The cellular phone is fast becoming the medium of opportunity for young video game designers and animators.

Thirty-four student animators from Vancouver Film School have had their works accepted by In-Fusio, a California company that will make the animations, called CellToons, available to play on Sprint cellphones.

Meanwhile Vancouver mobile data company AirG selected two video games by students from Toronto's Seneca College as winners of AirG's Seneca College Mobile Entertainment Development Competition. The winning games will be played on Bell Mobility cellphones.

AirG plans to announce a similar competition for B.C. students next month.

"It's a good recruitment option," said Frederick Ghahramani, AirG director, a former co-winner, with AirG partners Vincent Yen and Bryce Pasechnik, of the \$50,000 New Ventures B.C. competition. "It's a good way to attract like-minded kids and a good way to find some entrepreneurial talent.

"It wasn't so long ago that I was a student, and the first \$10,000 of working capital we put into the company came from competitions," said Ghahramani. "So it's something near and dear to our hearts."

Ghahramani, a graduate of Simon Fraser University, said similar competitions have led to AirG hirings. The company, which has grown from three to 50 employees in less than five years, hired three students whose work placed in the Western Engineering Conference Competition.

The Seneca winners receive a cash prize, get their games on Bell Mobility phones and have AirG publish their games so that, as Ghahramani put it, "they can generate some revenue from their game."

Ghahramani compared student competitions like the Seneca event to Canadian Idol. "It gives them a chance to get fast-tracked and showcase their talents."

The Vancouver Film School shorts for CellToons, consisting of one-to-three-minute animations, will be added to the mobile multimedia channels available on the Sprint PCS Vision Multimedia Services network.

In addition to using the Vancouver Film School student films, In-Fusio (Thumbworks, the company that started CellToons, was bought earlier this week by In-Fusio), plans to use animations from ADV Films, a producer of Japanese anime, Academy Award nominee Bruno Bozzetto, computer graphics house Blur Studios, and independent filmmaker Mike Wellins.

The Vancouver Film School students will not be paid for their works.

"The students are ecstatic," said Paul Gertz, director of business affairs for Vancouver Film School, who said Thumbworks (now In-Fusio) approached the school with the idea at last year's E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo) in Los Angeles.

"This is an opportunity to gain exposure for our students as well as for the school," said Gertz.

The idea is similar to having video games on cellphones. Sprint customers can play, via Channel 18 on the network, the animations, which will be frequently changed to keep the offerings fresh.

Craig Holland, In-Fusio's managing director for North America, said that while video games have played on cellphones for the

past three years, film, video and animation is a recent addition to mobile communication. Whereas older cellphones could only play films at a few frames per second, the new phones are capable of showing them at 15 frames per second.

Gertz was impressed with the picture quality of CellToons.

"The quality is unbelievable," said Gertz. "It's shockingly good."

In-Fusio's Holland reciprocated the praise. "I've been very impressed with the Vancouver Film School animations," said Holland. "It's some of our best material."