

Take a look at PEI jobs in video game development and related fields

by Heidi Riley

New Media

In April, high school and junior high school students gathered at the **Atlantic Technology Centre** in Charlottetown to check out PEI video game development companies and the jobs available here. The third-annual **Impact Expo** was designed to spark the interest of students and encourage them to consider the career opportunities in this growing field.

The Impact Expo was organized by the **PEI Cultural Human Resources Sector Council (CHRSC)** and the **Innovation and Technology Sector Council (ITSC)**. The event was funded by **PEI Business Development Inc.**

The PEI Cultural Human Resources Sector Council and the IT Sector Council are funded by the Canada/Prince Edward Island Labour Market Development Agreement (www.lmda.pe.ca).

For further information, call **CHRSC** at 367-4460 and **ITSC** at 566-3988



John Eden

A growing industry

“Even during this time of recession, video game sales continue to increase,” says **John Eden**, Director of Business, **Sculpin QA**, a video game testing company located at the ATC. John is also the president of the **PEI Interactive Media Alliance**. “Between January 2008 and January 2009, software sales in the US grew nine percent and hardware sales grew by 11 percent.”

How many people work in video game development?

- 40,000 people in the US
- 9,500 people in Canada
- 120 on PEI

Salaries

“Programmers start at \$35,000 a year and can earn up to \$50,000 within a few years,” says John. “Artists in entry-level positions make less than \$30,000 and salaries can grow to \$50,000 within five years.”

What does it take to work in video gaming?

- **Programmers** write the computer code that makes games come alive. “These jobs are in high demand,” says John. “To be a programmer, you need good skills in math, problem solving, and communication.” **UPEI** offers a four-year Computer Science degree program where you can specialize in video game programming in the third and fourth year.
- **Artists** can specialize in doing characters or backgrounds. They need to start with good drawing skills, and then go on to learn video techniques at a program such as **Video Game Art and Design** at **Holland College**.
- **Designers** write the descriptions that the artists will use to create the characters. They make sure the game is fun, consistent, and balanced, so that rules are followed and the levels get progressively more difficult. Designers need to have knowledge of basic programming and 3D design.
- **Producers** run the show. They record each milestone in the production, and make sure everyone stays on budget and on schedule. They need experience in management and problem solving.
- **Testers** document the hundreds of bugs they may find as they check out every level of the game. Testers need to be good problem solvers, be detail oriented, and able to communicate their findings.

“There is definitely work here on PEI, and the training is available here too,” says John. “There is such a need for people that studios are hiring students even before they graduate. Working in this industry can be tough. Working long days before a deadline is common, but there are perks too. Time is given back, and people are doing what they love.”

Video game design companies on PEI

- Other Ocean Interactive Ltd.
- Telos Productions
- Bight Games
- Longtail Studios
- Sculpin QA (testing)

How can high school students prepare for a career in gaming on PEI?

Math, computer studies, and English writing courses teach important skills necessary in this field. If you think you are interested, try to shadow someone working in this field to get a concept of what the job is really like. The next step is to prepare a portfolio of your work, which you will need to be accepted to post-secondary education in this field.



Brian Sharp

A career in animation

Brian Sharp with **Trapeze Animation Studios Ltd.** showed students the work his company is doing. Their animated series, **Raspberry Jazzberry Jam**, is featured on CBC. “To be good at this work, it takes about 10,000 hours or about 10 years of practice,” says Brian. “If you have been drawing since you were young, and you can draw at a high skill level, you may be ready to get training and try for a job in animation.”

Trapeze spreads production over locations in three cities: Charlottetown, Halifax, and Toronto. “In Charlottetown, we have 20 staff, including 12 graduates from Holland College who do the **background art**,” says Brian. “We also have **storyboard artists, layout artists, editors, software specialists, and management**. In Halifax, 60 people work on animation. In Toronto, 10 people do sound, music, voice-overs and live action segments.”

For more information, visit www.sculpinqa.ca

For more information, visit <http://animation.trapeze.com>

www.employmentjourney.com