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Celtic to house major special effects studio

(Source: [The Advocate](#))

Digital animation studio Pixomondo to locate in BR, add 75 jobs

An Academy Award-winning special effects studio plans to open shop in Baton Rouge, becoming the largest tenant at Celtic Media Centre.

Pixomondo, winner of the Oscar for best visual effects in the Martin Scorsese film "Hugo," will open its 12th studio next month, with Baton Rouge joining Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Berlin, Los Angeles, Shanghai, Beijing, London, Munich, Burbank, Toronto and Hamburg.

Annual salaries will average more than \$65,000, plus benefits. Pixomondo will hire 50 people in its first year, expanding to 75 by the end of its second year, according to Louisiana Economic Development.

Pixomondo will become the largest tenant at Celtic, a sprawling 23-acre campus of more than 150,000 square feet of stage space, said Patrick Mulhearn, director of studio operations at Raleigh Studios, manager of the Celtic Media Centre.

"They will be what you might call an anchor tenant for us," Mulhearn remarked after a press conference Wednesday announcing the development.

Landing Pixomondo was billed by local and state leaders as the natural maturity of the state's film industry, which trails only California and New York in activity. Last year, some 151 movie projects exceeded an estimated \$1 billion in industry activity, Gov. Bobby Jindal said in prepared remarks Wednesday.

"Their (Pixomondo) decision speaks volumes about how far our state has come when it comes to improving our business climate and providing competitive incentives," Jindal said.

"Opening an office in Baton Rouge fits perfectly with our overall company vision," Thilo Kuther, Pixomondo's founder and CEO, said in a statement. "Louisiana offers a very generous production tax credit that we can pass on to our clients to bolster our project load as well as our growing teams in Los Angeles, London and Germany — not to mention China and Canada. Baton Rouge is a beautiful city with a wealth of resources. We've already connected with the Louisiana State University computer science department to help set up remote render farms and virtualization with our other studios."

Filling the initial 50 jobs — and the other 25 in several months — is not expected to be hugely difficult, Kuther, 48, said.

Already, seven or eight workers in the Los Angeles studio are expressing an interest in moving to Baton Rouge, he noted.

And large urban centers like London or Berlin do not automatically translate to an easier access to highly skilled and talented workers, Kuther continued.

"It doesn't necessarily mean that you get more talent," he remarked. "It means that there's more competition. If you are in Vancouver or London, it means you are fighting over workforce."

The new jobs announced for Baton Rouge on Wednesday should not be viewed as a shuffling of positions among Pixomondo studios, but a net increase company-wide, Kuther said.

The Baton Rouge studio will work with Pixomondo's international locations on major projects that require around-the-clock production across different time zones. Project work will include visual effects for corporate campaigns as well as film and TV productions.

"Hugo" was the work of nine locations. And the company is gearing up to provide effects for a \$100 million Tom Cruise action movie. Kuther would not disclose the name of the film.

To secure the Pixomondo project, the state offered incentives in the form of job-training through the Louisiana FastStart program. Pixomondo will also take advantage of the state's digital media and film production tax credits and the Quality Jobs Program.

Founded in 2001, Pixomondo has created visual effects for more than 30 feature films, including "Journey 2: The Mysterious Island," "Red Tails," "Sucker Punch," "Super 8," "Fast Five," "Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief," "2012" and "Hugo."

The company is in production on VFX for "Snow White" and the "Huntsman" and "The Amazing Spiderman," and TV series that include "Game of Thrones," "Terra Nova," "Hawaii Five-0" and "Grimm."

Publish Date:
03-29-2012

