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Video Game Development Grows In Louisiana

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Dragons, warriors, super heroes and bizarre beings from beyond your imagination are just some of the creatures haunting cities across Louisiana. What might sound like a typical Mardi Gras in the early 1990s, today describes a game development sector that's stoking a thriving interactive media and software development industry in Louisiana.

In the past decade, Louisiana's nation-leading workforce program — LED FastStart® — and a game-changing incentive have elevated the state's digital game industry, a subset of a prime Louisiana target, the software and IT sector.

 Rogue Initiative creating a virtual reality experience

The Rogue Initiative's new Baton Rouge, Louisiana, studio will create content that blends traditional storytelling with new media applications, such as virtual reality and immersive reality.

As Louisiana landed major corporate technology centers from IBM, GE, CSRA, CGI and others, video and online game developers flocked to Louisiana as well. A landmark 2008 project, EA's North American Test Center, came to LSU in Baton Rouge, where LED FastStart trainers created game-based training techniques that were adopted by EA at its studios worldwide.

Within five years, the nearly \$30 million Louisiana Digital Media Center became home to EA's global testing operations for sports games, LSU's supercomputing operations and a digital media interdisciplinary curriculum.

French firm Gameloft opened a digital game studio in New Orleans, where it was joined by successful online startups, such as TurboSquid and Lucid. Other game developers and animators took notice of the emerging Louisiana technology cluster.

Among them is Chicago area-based High Voltage Software, which announced plans for a New Orleans game development studio in late 2014.

"With the growth of the gaming industry in the greater New Orleans area, through High Voltage Software, inXile, TurboSquid, The Rogue Initiative, Pixel Dash and others, we're seeing opportunities to keep homegrown talent here," says Kerry Ganofsky, the High Voltage Software CEO and founder.

Sparkling the growth of game development is Louisiana Economic Development's incentive for Digital Media and Software Development, which offers a 25 percent tax credit on in-state payroll and an 18 percent tax credit on qualified production expenses.

[LEARN MORE](#) about The Digital Media and Software Development incentive.

In 2017, Louisiana upped its game with an incentive that offers 15-20 percent payroll rebates for Qualified Entertainment Companies and Qualified Music Companies — a complement to the digital incentive and one that encourages permanent investment in the state for companies that hire content creators in the entertainment space.

[LEARN MORE](#) about the Qualified Entertainment Company incentive.

Louisiana's latest addition to that space is The Rogue Initiative, a California-based full spectrum studio whose Baton Rouge operations initially will employ 20 professionals creating content that blends traditional storytelling with new media applications, such as virtual reality and immersive reality applications for film, TV and video games.

That firm's principals include alumni who've worked for Amblin Entertainment, Pixar, DreamWorks Animation, Sony Pictures and Disney.

Marc Aubanel directs the LSU Digital Media Arts & Engineering program that's joining efforts with The Rogue Initiative and others to prepare future game development professionals in Louisiana.

"We're excited to see such an innovative technology company add to the vibrant tech center in the capital city, and advise our DMAE program," Aubanel says. "The Rogue Initiative represents the future of entertainment by combining storytelling and video game development in an exciting new medium of full 360-degree (virtual reality)."

In a state where nearly \$7 billion in film and TV production has taken place since 2002, supporting 14,000 jobs, and where new digital media, software and IT services companies have generated more than 5,000 additional tech jobs since 2008, Louisiana is poised to create boundless opportunities for young creative professionals.



"We're actively working with partners in education and government to find ways to best empower people to invest and commit to Louisiana's growing gaming market." - Kerry Ganofsky, High Voltage Software CEO and Founder.

"We want to continue that fostering of talent," says High Voltage Software's Ganofsky, "and we're actively working with partners in education and government to find ways to best empower people to invest and commit to Louisiana's growing gaming market."

The Players

A brief look at some of the key players in Louisiana's game development industry:



The global giant that started Louisiana's gaming development boom in 2008 has thrived on the state's local talent pool. In 2013, EA outgrew its first home and moved to LSU's main campus into the top floor of the new \$30 million, 90,000-square-foot Digital Media Center. EA's state-of-the-art facility is dedicated to quality assurance game testing of endless EA titles. Read the case study.



An international leader in mobile gaming, Gameloft opened a New Orleans office in 2011. Vivendi SA, a global media conglomerate based in Paris, acquired a controlling stake in Gameloft in mid-2016 and the company has redoubled its efforts in New Orleans.



Based near Chicago, High Voltage opened a New Orleans studio in 2014. Having shipped over 100 game titles and having worked with more than 25 major brands, from Star Wars and Toy Story to Batman and LEGO®, the company continues to thrive in Louisiana. High

Voltage was one of two local companies to develop the first Louisiana-based virtual reality games. Its entry, Damaged Core, was launched on the popular Oculus Rift VR headset.



In 2015, inXile expanded from its home base in California to include a new studio in New Orleans. Founded by industry veteran Brian Fargo, inXile is the other company to recently develop a Louisiana-produced virtual reality game, The Mage's Tale, also launched for the popular Oculus Rift VR headset.



Set to open its Baton Rouge operation in late 2017, The Rogue Initiative is currently working on a partnership with film producer and director Michael Bay and has produced the 360-degree, virtual reality film experience, Agent Emerson, which was shot in Baton Rouge, and Crowe: The Drowned Armory, an interactive virtual reality game for high-end VR headsets.

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