Report on Game Development Companies

According to some financial forecasters, the business of video games is expected to total $111 billion dollars in 2015 (AFP, 2014). This popularity and success has led to the establishment of game development companies around the world trying to grab a piece of the action. Several of these companies have found a home in Canada, including some of the largest AAA developers like Ubisoft, and Electronic Arts. These companies have found success by developing popular games that appeal to a mass audience. But the true success has come by harnessing the talents of so many creative and talented people, from artists to programmers to sales and marketing. The purpose of this report is to highlight some of the major game companies operating in Canada, describing their history, popular game releases, and current employment opportunities.

Ubisoft

History

The French game company Ubisoft, currently has a large development studio in the Canadian cities of Montreal and Toronto, but this was not always the case. Ubisoft began life in 1986 as a small company established by the Guillemot family in Brittany, France, distributing and marketing games across the country (Bertz, 2011). They developed and launched their first game in 1987, called Zombi(Ubisoft, n.d.). Building on their successes, the company eventually developed the game Rayman in 1995. The title character has become an icon in the video game industry and is instantly recognizable because of his lack of arms or legs. The success of the game has led to several more in the series, and continued success for Ubisoft, so much so that they went public in 1996 and were able to raise more capital for new games with larger scopes (Bertz, 2011). This also led to Ubisoft's world-wide expansion, as they began opening studios in several countries, including Canada and China.

With this expansion, the company pushed further into the gaming market. The development of the game Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six, opened the eyes of the North American gaming audience to this exciting developer/publisher. The Tom Clancy series continued to expand, creating other notable series under this banner. Titles include the hits Splinter Cell, which began in 2002, Ghost Recon, which began in 2006, and further Rainbow Six games over the years(Ubisoft, n.d.). Each series has sold millions of copies and firmly established Ubisoft as

a major player in the video gaming scene. The company truly became a global player in the market, but the successes did not stop there. The most popular franchise in Ubisoft's history was developed in 2007, with the game Assassin's Creed (Bertz, 2011). Since the release of this first game, several sequels have spawned, including the latest in the series: Assassin's Creed Unity.

While enjoying their continued success, the company has risen to become the one of the largest game publishers in the world, competing with powerhouse companies like Electronic Arts and Activision Blizzard. Ubisoft has sold more than 500 million games to date, and currently has 30 studios operating around the world, employing over 9000 people(Ubisoft, n.d.). As they continue to push on with their popular game series, they continue to develop and publish smaller titles, always looking for new and innovative games to build on.

Games

Ubisoft has had many successful game franchises over the years. Some of these have been very highly regarded in the games industry, receiving critical acclaim and massive sales figures. Three of their most popular game series are Rayman, Assassin's Creed, and Far Cry.

Rayman is a 2D action platforming game, with the most recent iteration of the series being the game Rayman Legends. The game features the title character Rayman and many of his friends. The user can choose which character they wish to use, and take this character through many levels that are unlocked as the game progresses. One of the game's most distinctive features is it's art style, which is cartoon-like and well animated.

The game series Assassin's Creed features several titles, the latest of which is Assassin's Creed Unity. Most of the games in this series are 3rd person action games. The user plays the role of the main character, which is typically an assassin as the name would suggest. The game has a series of missions that tell the story of the particular character and events involve not only assassinations, but several other mission types as well. The game is also known for its vast open worlds which the user can explore and discover, buying items and finding collectibles along the way.

Finally, the Tom Clancy series of games includes many popular titles. Among these, one of the most well-liked and highly regarded of these is the series Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell. These games are known for their 3rd person stealth gameplay, where the player must sneak

by enemies and use an array of both lethal and non-lethal options to incapacitate enemies throughout the levels. The series also focuses on near-future weapons and other technology, such as night vision goggles, and silenced guns. The player must use these tools to progress through levels, trying not to alert the enemy to the presence of the player character.

Employment Opportunities

There are several jobs available at Ubisoft in many locations around the globe. This report focuses on the jobs available at Ubisoft Toronto, because that is the author's home town, and it is one of the most recent studios created by the company. There are many current job opportunities available. Here is a summary of the skills required for a selection of these positions:

Gameplay Programmer

This position requires a Bachelor of Science and skills in C/C++ as well as console development. The candidate will be ensuring that the playability of the game is top notch. The successful candidate will also need to be detailed and resourceful, with a strong ability to solve problems. As with any business, strong interpersonal skills are needed, but especially so here because game development is usually a team effort.

Level Artist

This position requires a college degree in 3D art techniques. Experience in modelling, texturing and lighting are also necessary. The candidate must have basic knowledge of video games and also be able to work as part of a team. Additionally, the successful candidate will need to take initiative, be creative, and be able to accept feedback and change.

Associate Producer

This position requires a degree in business administration or project management. The candidate will need to have prior experience in management, especially in video game development. As a manager, they will need the relevant leadership skills, but must also be able to problem solve well and be creative.

Electronic Arts (EA)

History

Electronic Arts (EA) is one of the largest video game companies in the world. Like Ubisoft, they have several locations around the world. They both develop and publish games for every available major platform (Electronic Arts, n.d.). The company began life in 1982 and was founded by Trip Hawkins (Electronic Arts, n.d.). The company's creation was a reaction the state of media at that time. The founding members, along with Hawkins, foresaw the potential future of video games as a form of creative expression and massively successful business opportunity (Waugh, 2006).

However, the company did not start with the intention of making it's own games. The founding idea was that EA would be a distributor and publisher of games, without any in-house development (Waugh, 2006). This changed in 1987 with the release of the game Skate or Die! which became a popular game for the Nintendo Entertainment System. Building on this success, and experimenting with licenses in games, and thus began the creation of several sports franchises, including the massively popular Madden series of games.

Building on these successes, EA began to acquire development companies to produce more of its own games. With this expanding growth, and continued focus on creativity EA has continued to be successful and develop some of the most well-known and well-liked games in the industry. Although they have faced criticism for abandoning some of the founding ideals of the company, they have risen to become one of the top gaming companies, and continue to be a major force in the world of video gaming (Waugh, 2006).

Games

EA has built a vast library of games over the years. These games have spanned a wide variety of genres and have had varying degrees of critical and financial success. Even narrowing down the list to include the highlights would result in a vast array of games. This report will focus on some of the company's most well known titles which include the Madden series of football games, the Need for Speed racing series, and the multiplayer shooters under the Battlefield name.

The Madden series began with the game John Madden Football in 1989 (Giant Bomb, n.d.). This game series is football simulation in which users can take the helm of their favorite NFL team and lead them to Superbowl glory. The latest game released is Madden NFL 15. This game keeps the series tradition of being a up-to-date and accurate rendition of NFL football. This game, as well as many others in the series, is known for having top-notch graphics and realistic player animation. The user can play as any NFL team, and choose from a variety of real life football plays to execute their game strategy. Team rosters are kept up to date, and games can be played against the game AI or against live opponents both on and offline.

While there hasn't been a release of a Need for Speed racing title since 2013's Need for Speed Rivals, this series has had many successful games released in its history. The series is not a true to life simulation, but rather a more arcade-style of racing that focuses on fun, high speeds, and thrilling action. Many of the games feature high speed police chases in which the player must avoid being caught by the police by employing their driving skills. The latest game is an open-world racing environment and does not include specific tracks that are common in several racing games. This open environment allows the player to drive anywhere, discovering hidden paths and jumps.

Finally, the Battlefield series of games is one of the top-selling multiplayer shooters available. These games are all of the 3rd person shooter variety. Players control the character and try to rack up the most kills to exert dominance over their competitors. However, many of these games include a story campaign mode as well, where players progress through a series of missions in which they shoot enemies in a variety of environments. The latest in the series is the game Battlefield: Hardline, where the story revolves around cops and criminals, and the story is told from several character's perspectives. Yet the highlight of any Battlefield game is it's multiplayer aspects. The hallmark of the multiplayer action in this series is the fun and frenetic gameplay. Not only can players run around a map area to shoot others, but they are often given control of several types of vehicles which add to the mayhem. There are also typically several game types, and in Battlefield: Hardline these include: Heist, where criminals try to break into a vault and the cops attempt to stop them, Conquest, where teams of players try to capture flags throughout the map, and many more.

Employment Opportunities

With Electronic Arts being a very large developer, there are several opportunities available world-wide. Continuing with the Canadian focus of this report, EA has openings available at

their Burnaby, BC location. A summary of skills for selected positions include:

Technical Director – UI

> This position requires a degree in computer science or software engineering. The candidate must have a lot of previous experience in both leading technical teams, and specific UI technical work. Being a managerial position, leadership and communication skills are also required. The previous use of several specific tools is must, such as Microsoft Office, JIRA, and of course, C/C++ and other object-oriented programming experience.

Development Director

> A candidate for the development director position must have relevant experience with team leadership, communication, and differing project development methodologies (e.g. Agile development). The successful candidate will have excellent leadership skills and be able to participate in the hiring process. They will also need to be great at project management and execution of plans/projects.

Associate Environment Artist

> This position requires the artist to be able to produce work in a variety of different styles, with the ability to think and create in 3D. The work produced must be highly detailed with an emphasis on realism. The environment artist focuses on both indoor and outdoor environments and may need to create physical models to represent these spaces.

Conclusion

With the video game industry continuing to grow, the importance of game development companies on the global scale is also continuing to increase. From small, independent developers to the industry powerhouses like Electronic Arts and Ubisoft, there is a booming business and a lot of market share to be accessed. Game companies are also becoming major employers in several countries, including Canada. With the development of popular titles, both critically and financially, companies can position themselves to have increasing global influence in the entertainment industry. Showing no significant signs of slowing down, this industry is here to stay. With this continuing growth and success, the business of video gaming seems to be one that smart investors, managers, and workers should all consider taking advantage of.

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Notes

Websites for gaming companies are hyperlinked in their titles.

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