**Video Game Company Research**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to research 3 of the biggest video game companies in the world, identify their most influential games (whether it be through its technology or its design), and discuss the company’s open Canadian positions (provided there are any). The company’s websites will be referenced, along with reputable video game journalism publications. By the end of this paper, the reader will have a broader understanding of the companies chosen, and the video game industry.

**Introduction**

The games industry is one of the most profitable in the entertainment business. The array of skills required to develop a full-scale triple-A game is so vast that the industry creates a massive amount of jobs. Despite this, breaking into the industry can still be a challenge; so many people are so passionate about the medium that many will be competing for open positions. It is good to get a leg-up on the competition and know more about the positions you are applying for, and the companies that you are applying to. The following are just a few of the largest video game companies who have studios somewhere in Canada.[[1]](#footnote-1) Electronic Arts, Capcom, and Ubisoft are three of the largest video game companies in the world. With the information presented in this paper, the reader will be more prepared in the event that they may apply to a position at one of these companies.

**Electronic Arts**

Electronic Arts (typically shortened and further referred to as EA) is a video game conglomerate founded in 1982 by Trip Hawkins. The company is currently headquartered in Redwood City, California. After his success as an executive at Apple, Hawkins desired to form a video game publishing company. Treating games as art, and referring to developers as “software artists”, the company aspired to legitimize the game industry and game development as a profession. It is the second largest publicly-traded video game company in the Americas and Europe.

Influential Games

**NHL Hockey**

Released: 1991

Platform(s): Sega Genesis

Sales: Indeterminate

Innovation: First sports game to feature a proper league license

NHL Hockey was developed under the EA Sports subsidiary, originally created for the massive popularity of John Madden Football and similar sports simulation games. The games under this label are consistently praised for their accurate simulation of their respective sports. Many of the sports ended up becoming syndicated as yearly series, so as to update the information and player rosters.

NHL Hockey is influential because unlike the EA Sports games before it, the sport’s premier league actually lent their license to the game. This allowed the game to utilize actual league teams, along with fully accurate rosters and stats. This is now a genre and industry standard. The game is consistently listed as one of the strongest titles for the Sega Genesis / Mega Drive. The success of the NHL series (which has now had a unique entry every year since 1991) paved the way for nearly every other sport to be sponsored by their respective premier leagues.

**Battlefield: Bad Company**

Released: 2008

Platform(s): Playstation 3, Xbox 360

Sales: 2.8 Million

Innovation: The Frostbite engine

The Battlefield series is EA’s premiere series in the First-Person Shooter genre. This particular entry in the series, Battlefield: Bad Company, is the series’ first attempt at a proper single player campaign. Previous entries were primarily focused on the multiplayer game modes to great success, and the single player campaign is now a standard in the series.

The game’s biggest innovation is the EA DICE developed Frostbite engine. The engine touts 2 very innovative features above other engines; sound depth perception, and dynamic environment destruction. The sound depth perception allows a player to perceive both the direction and distance of a given sound, increasing the player’s immersion and improving the simulation. The dynamic environment destruction truly brought the game’s world to life, and gave players a slightly new experience upon each playthrough. Future iterations of the engine further improved on these features to an astonishing level. While the engine itself is owned solely by EA, the features of the engine were a huge influence on the improvement of publicly available, industry standard engines.

**Careers**

There were no openings in the closest studio to me, EA Kitchener. These are openings in the next closest studio in Montreal.

Level Designer - Designing major levels for EA’s newest studio, Motive.

This career would be best supported by courts in arts and graphic design, but the career has a lot to do with experience and game intuition more than education.

Engine Developer - Implementing new features of EA’s game engines and internal tools.

Courses in Computer Science and similar fields like Software Engineering are recommended. Courses that give broader understanding of low level machine programming can be a big asset.

**Capcom**

Capcom is a Japanese video game developer and publisher formed in 1979 in Osaka, Japan. The name is based on a compound of the words “capsule computers”, a term the company used to describe arcade cabinets. The company began as an arcade cabinet developer, but moved into the console market following the success of Nintendo’s Famicom (known as the Nintendo Entertainment System). They are well known for a multitude of multi-million selling franchises, and innovative creative games.

Influential Games

**Mega Man**

Released: 1987

Platform(s): Nintendo Entertainment System

Sales: 800 000+

Innovation: Innovative gameplay, creative use of the NES colour and sound technologies

Mega Man is a game in which users take control of the titular character on a quest to destroy an army of evil robots. The game did not sell well in North America until its 2nd iteration, however the innovation of this 1st game in the series is undeniable. The sprite work and animation was a major priority in the creation of the game; the titular character was made blue because the NES colour palette has the widest variety of blues to any other colour. The result was amazing sprite-work and animations previously unseen on the the system; while previous games on the system would tend to make art that required some imagination by the player, Mega Man and is characterized by the limitations of its platform.

Mega Man was also one of the first games to ever feature non-linear game progression. There are 6 levels in the main game, but the player can do something that was unthinkable at the time; beat them in any order. The player is given the option to beat the 6 stages in any order they wanted, with free use of weapons acquired in previous levels.

All things considered, Mega Man was a huge step forward in game design, and the standards to which game’s utilize a system’s capabilities for artistic purposes.

**Street Fighter II**

Released: 1991

Platform(s): CPS1, CPS2, Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis

Sales: 14 million (home console ports)

Innovation: Set the standard for the entire fighting game genre

Street Fighter II is the sequel nobody asked for to a financially unsuccessful 2D fighting game. The original Street Fighter was more typical of the fighting game genre at the time; 2 playable characters (Ryu and Ken, who were simply recoloured sprites) and a focus on the single player experience. Street Fighter II decided to increase the playable character count. While previous games in the genre may have up to 3 unique characters to choose from, Street Fighter II would raise this to a record breaking 8 unique fighters. These fighters were also the opponents that you would face in single player, allowing you to now take control of the other characters you see throughout the game. The developers also recognized an issue with the game’s accessibility; secret special moves were extremely difficult to pull off, to the point where a player may never actually pull one off. To go along with each unique fighter’s completely independent set of techniques was an execution leniency system that made it easy for any newcomer to the game to fully access their fighter’s potential. This brought along with it the unintentional combo system, an absolute staple in fighting games today.

These gameplay changes also led to a complete change in the game’s focus, putting emphasis on the player vs player mentality; players could be consistently re-challenged by any arcade-goer with enough quarters to do so, while the king of the hill kept their quarter going with each successive win. This competitive spirit is invaluable to the spirit of the genre to this day.

Street Fighter II was a massive step forward in the fighting game genre, the apex of 1-on-1 competitive gaming, and a major pop-culture influence.

**Careers**

These are some examples of positions available at Capcom:

Platform Software Engineer - Creating companion apps for various Capcom games.

Computer Science courses are once again useful here. A focus on large system development and modern web and mobile technologies are recommended for this style of position.

Game Designer - Designing all possible facets of the game, from menus to environments to characters.

There are programs at some universities designed to teach game design. Drawing and perhaps digital art courses and character design would be useful as well. Knowledge of programming is a huge asset. This is a very broad field that is generally broken into either through an unrelated entry level position, or by starting as an independent developer.

**Ubisoft**

Ubisoft is a French video game publisher based in Montreuil, with a major subsidiary in Montreal. Founded on March 12, 1986 by five brothers in France. One of the major publishers in France for many years, they have grown to be the fourth largest publicly-traded video game company in the world in the Americas and Europe. Ubisoft’s Montreal office is now the forefront of their technological innovation.

Influential Games

**Assassin’s Creed**

Released: 2006

Platform(s): Playstation 3, Xbox 360, PC

Sales: 8 million

Innovation: The Scimitar Engine, historical accuracy in plot and environments

Assassin’s Creed was an ambitious project headed by Ubisoft Montreal. The game was an attempt at a fully historically accurate adventure game based around the era of the Third Crusade. The game was very innovative for the time, using a new proprietary engine to render the open worlds with extreme historical accuracy.

The Scimitar engine was originally developed my Ubisoft Montreal for their open world games, starting first with Assassin’s Creed. After using a legacy engine in the interim, the development of the engine was finished partway through the development of the game and streamlined open world design and gameplay. The company continues to use updates to this engine on their games today, under the new name AnvilNext. The level of historical accuracy combined with the Scimitar Engine technology was a huge leap by industry standards, and much of what the engine did 12 years ago is still reflective of open world video game development today.

**Just Dance**

Released: 2009

Platform(s): Wii

Sales: 7.2 million

Innovation: Innovative use of motion sensing controls, appealing to market outside of typical gaming demographics

Just Dance is a party game developed by Ubisoft Milan and Ubisoft Paris. The game originated from a minigame in the completely unrelated Rayman Raving Rabbids: TV Party, in which the player would make dance poses as instructed by the game, using the Wii’s motion sensor controllers to demonstrate their pose to the game. The decision to turn this into a game was a critically panned, but commercially successful decision. Using the Wii’s Remote controllers, players would follow along full dance routines with the controllers. Critics described it as “a paper thing single player experience”, but the game was immensely popular among demographics typically not captured by video games, and has been a major seller for the publisher since its debut in 2009. The wild success of the game has sparked an entire lucrative genre of immersive motion dance games. The entire genre follows the foundation set by this incredibly successful and innovative title.

**Careers**

The following are positions open at Ubisoft’s Montreal office.

Technical Art Director – Choose and prepare the tools, game engine, and technologies used for the development of a project.

Knowledge of graphic technologies and design, as well as game engine technology are important. Digital art and graphics courses are recommended, along with a lot of industry experience.

Game Monetization Manager – Develop the monetization strategies for upcoming and existing projects.

This position would be benefitted by business and economics knowledge. Some knowledge of game design, as well as some marketing instincts would be useful too, to know how best to integrate these strategies without intruding on users’ experience.

**Conclusion**

With the information found by this research, the reader will be more knowledgeable and prepared to enter the gaming industry. With knowledge of music, art, programming, or simply a passion for the medium, anyone can break into the industry as long as they are diligent and work to the maximum of their potential.

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1. As of the writing of this paper, Capcom Vancouver was still open. All references to Capcom Vancouver and the games they developed were subsequently removed upon the studio’s closing. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)