5 ways to break into the video game industry

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

When you break out the game console to play a video game like NBA2K, chances are the biggest decision you'll have to make is which player or team you want to be. From game designers and software engineers who program the games to graphic artists or electrical engineers who design the game consoles, careers in the video game industry abound. Participate in game jams A game jam is a contest in which participants create a new video game within a set time frame.

FULL TEXT

When you break out the game console to play a video game like NBA2K, chances are the biggest decision you'll have to make is which player or team you want to be. But have you ever considered becoming one of the people who actually designs a game like NBA2K?

Worth an estimated US$336 billion, the video game industry is bigger than TV, movies and music combined. And since the industry is growing at a rapid pace, there are plenty of opportunities to work in this field. From game designers and software engineers who program the games to graphic artists or electrical engineers who design the game consoles, careers in the video game industry abound.

These jobs pay from about $55,000 to $100,000 or more annually. But somewhat like the NBA itself, the path into the video game industry is filled with tough competition.

As former head of graphics for a large video game company –and as head of the Learning Interactive Visualization Experience –or LIVE Lab –at Texas A&M University, I know firsthand what it takes to land a job in the video game industry. Here are 5 tips on how to do just that.

1. Design your own games

When it comes time to apply for a job or even an internship at a video game company, it helps to show the games you've created or modified.

Fortunately, game engines, which are the underlying technology for games, are available free of charge and allow you to create your own game. Unreal and Unity are two you may want to try out.

You can also use free software, such as Houdini and Blender, to create video game assets such as buildings, characters, vehicles and animations.

If it's too daunting to create a game from scratch, you can always "mod" –short for "modifying" –an existing game like Portal 2, Civilization or Minecraft. This is a great start to learning the basics of game design and asset creation.

2. Participate in game jams

A game jam is a contest in which participants create a new video game within a set time frame. Game jams are a great way to meet and work with others on a game project and just learn how to design games. Many jams feature video game company representatives. These company reps serve as mentors, judges and coaches. They can give you tips and tricks on how to break into the industry. They can also give you leads on jobs.

Game jams are usually short, like a day or two, but some last a week or more. You can enter a game jam as an individual or as a small team. Some game jams are focused on specific themes such as health, conservation or science and provide resources for teachers and students to participate, such as the Games for Change Student Challenge. Other game jams are open to anyone including professionals, like the Global Game Jam. Some game

jams are in-person, allowing you to meet face to face with other game designers, artists, developers, industry mentors and game companies, like Chillennium.

3. Attend game conventions

One of the biggest conferences in the U.S. is the annual Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, which historically has attracted over 29,000 attendees. In Europe, the annual Gamescom conference in Cologne, Germany, has drawn over 370,000 attendees. Several PAX conferences happen throughout the year in different locations in the U.S. PAX started out as Penny Arcade Expo before developing into a full conference and exhibition. These conferences enable attendees to find out about new games, meet professionals from the games industry, play games and attend seminars and workshops on topics related to designing and developing games.

A conference like PAX East also provides opportunities for indie developers to showcase their games and get feedback from the public. Most of the conferences will be back in person in 2022 and require a fee to attend or exhibit. The price for tickets can range from $50 to several hundred dollars.

4. Take classes in game design

Many high schools, community colleges and universities now offer game design classes.

In addition to these classes, it helps to take classes in math, physics, art and technology, starting in high school if you can. Almost all careers in the video games industry benefit from all of these fields. A game designer trying to create a balanced game requires a solid foundation in math and statistics. Balancing a game requires the designer to use math and statistics to ensure that no particular game element –such as a particular character or strategy –overpowers any other element.

Even if you don't think you will be using math or doing any art, having a basic understanding of both and being able to talk about those subjects with colleagues goes a long way.

5. Play away

In order to create great games, you need to be well versed in the games that are currently being played and have been successful in the past. This means that you should also play games that you normally would not play and even games that you don't like. Not all people like all games. There are many different types of games from entertainment games to educational games, games for health, games for science and many more. Being able to critically look at games and identify which elements work well, which elements could be improved and which elements you might use for your own games will help you become a great game designer.

Breaking into the games industry is possible with a little bit of work. It can also be hugely rewarding. Just imagine the game you helped create is teaching players new knowledge, or helping players heal faster, supporting scientists in the discovery of new proteins or entertaining players for hours.

Andre Thomas is currently serving as CEO of Triseum an educational game company. He previously worked for Electronic Arts, specifically EA Sports as Head of Graphics for their Football franchises, like Madden NFL, NCAA College Football, NFL Head Coach and NFL Blitz.

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DETAILS

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