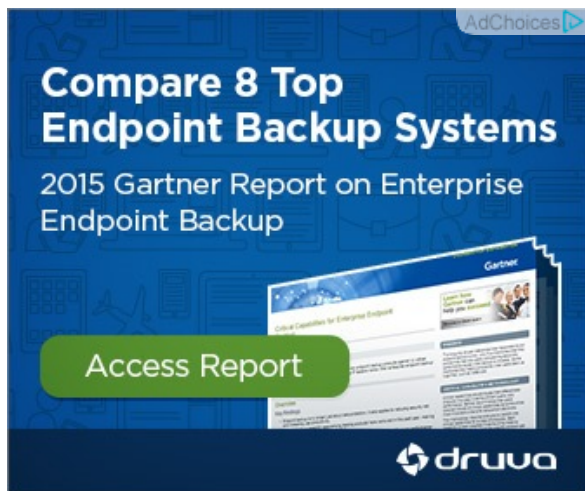


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Career Opportunities in Animation and Game Development

by Omeshwar Sharma | category **Career Opportunity**

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Don't even bother reading this career feature unless you've watched cartoons or played video games for a large part of your leisure life. You need to have spent a considerable amount of time lost in virtually-constructed worlds to excel at these professions. It's homework most people will not shirk.



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What is it?

A career in animation and game development means you become the person who constructs the characters and environments and then go on to make these two elements interact with each other. The computer-generated environment or the visual elements is what these two areas share in common. Their difference is that animated entertainment is a passive medium, while games are interactive. This adds one more element to gaming, which is programming.

Philip Edward Alexy, professor at Picasso Animation says, “The gaming industry has evolved over the last few years from simple bitmap pixilated scrollers and mindless killing-spree first-person shooters, to involving cinematic narratives where the players becomes one of, if not the only, major characters of that narrative. No longer is the majority of system resources being used to simple run the gaming engine. Now the actual artistic content can be close to photorealism as one would see on television.”

Why is it needed?

The outsourcing industry has attracted plenty of animation and game studios to send work over to India. There is some fantastic work being churned out at the numerous studios around India.

The gaming industry is a relatively new entrant in India. This is largely because the video gaming phenomenon is relatively new to India. Therefore, there is a serious lack of game production professionals who are gamers themselves. This lack of exposure is a major weak point. This is, therefore, the first USP that you have, as a gamer, over most of the game production professionals in India.

Animation requires a familiarity with the English language. This gives India the advantage for more outsourced work. Most animation studios in training

programmes. Besides this, we also have a large pool of low-cost, high-quality software engineers. A number of Indian animation companies have set up hi-tech studios manned by such engineers.

A US-based animator can cost about \$ 125 an hour. However, an Indian animator costs \$25 an hour. Toonz Animation offers animation at 25 percent to 40 percent lower rates than other Asian studios and much lower than those of American studios. The total cost for making a full-length animated film in America is estimated to be \$100 million to \$175 million. In India, it can be made for \$15 million to \$25 million. All these factors points to the fact that the animation-outsourced industry is set to grow.

Rajesh Rao, founder of Dhruva Interactive, India's first development gaming studio addresses the gaming scenario. According to Rao, "With the often quoted statistics of 350 million young Indians between the age of 15 and 35, there is definitely huge potential. I mean, china has a 3.5 billion dollar industry and it just happened in the last 8-9 years. In India too, things are bound to improve, especially with such disposable incomes. It'll be among the top 3-4. People who join now, have an early day entry. They will have experience. By the time the demand grows, the market increases, they will be industry champions. Especially, as the factors tat enable such a thing are coming together: with internet penetration and cheaper computers there would be 20-25 million broadband subscribers just as the mobiles are growing constantly."

The growth story

IT industry body NASSCOM has projected the Indian animation industry to reach \$1.16 billion of revenues by 2012. The industry is currently worth \$460 million and is expected to grow at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 27%.

Custom content development is the largest segment as of today, with an estimated industry size of \$187.5 million while animation education is slated to be the fastest growing. The report expects the gaming industry in India to reach \$1.06 billion of revenues by 2012 from its current \$212 million.

“The global animation and gaming industry has been growing at a CAGR of almost 8-10 % and this billion dollar industry has great scope of employment for those who are ready to try their skills in it. This industry has also been fairly recession resistant, if not recession proof and will continue to see demand over the next 3 years.” says Tapaas Chakravarti, CEO of DQE.

What are the related paths in this career that you can pursue?

- **Programmers**
- **Artists**
- **Designers**

The main thing is the intrinsic talent. Besides having a Bachelors' in Science, an Engineering in Computer Science with a background in Maths and Physics helps. Main knowledge is important and less stress on tools will do. All these three kind of profiles work together in a team. Talent is the key, experience not as important.

What do you do in your studio?

Vitek Goyal, CEO Pixeltek: We work on 3D graphics and video game development, mainly catering to game developers. We help in outsourcing and streamlining. We are a small team of 12 people. Instead of the whole game, we do a part of it, like character and asset building.

How did you get into this field?

Vitek Goyal: I used to love playing video games. I mean since I was young. Then, I went on to get a degree in

Interactive Arts from New York. At that time I was still a layman with no technical know-how. After I returned to India, I started reading articles doing research on game developing. After which I advertised in a paper and this was pretty much the road map of the company.

Why did you choose this career?

Vitek Goyal: We are always racing against crazy deadlines. And within that time to come up with results that are brilliant is quite a high.

With these unique highs come the benefit of seeing tangible results. It's rewarding to see your mention in the credits, to see your product on a shelf. To know that all the hard work you put into it has culminated into something that people would enjoy. This profession also gives you a chance to interact with people from abroad, meet different kind of mindsets, etc. It's worth it.

What are the required skill sets?

For Animators:

Somil Gupta, Managing Director, Trine Studios: "For this role we look at people who can sketch and paint. On top of this we look for people who have explored art-styles from all over the world. In the past, we have seen that when we ask an artist to create a western-styled character, they just cannot pull it off. This is because they haven't practiced their hand at different design styles and have stuck to what they learnt in art school," points out Somil Gupta, the Managing Director at Trine Studios in Mumbai.

Vinod AS, the National Head of Academics with Toonz Academy says that besides people who can just draw, the animators who have the real advantage are those that have acting skills. That's right. You read that right.

Acting. “The animator himself is an actor. We’ve noticed that the students that are good at mimicry tend to make better animators. They could be very bad artists, but if they can act, they still make excellent animators. Let’s say he wants to design a monkey. They the artists should be able to imitate the way a monkey walks and behave to be able to recreate it,” he says.

“You just cannot ask the computer to come up with, let’s say, a Victorian steampunk spaceship or a psycho-killer alien-robot assassin. you need artists to create this content and since we are rapidly approaching the point, if not surpassed it, where one can almost interchange the experience of watching a film or playing the newest chapter of the Resident Evil franchise. So we offer instructors that have industry experience in how to make a texture for that evil castle or create a walk-cycle for the muscle-bound hero for the latest and newest video game release,” says Philip Edward Alexy, professor at Picasso Animation, touching upon animation in video games.

For Game Production:

Vitek Goyal, CEO Pixeltek: Not necessarily a Master of Fine Arts degree. diploma, tutorials are great to have, but it’s the interest that you take in it.

Christopher Erhardt, founder Indian School of Gaming points out that candidates should focus on their math and English. The reason for this is that most game programming is math and all the major programming languages currently are in English.

also, strong C/C++ programming at all levels coupled with good knowledge of linear algebra, calculus, written English and some skills at Flash/BREW/Java in addition to the C++ is needed for game programming. C# is as an emerging language for this space as well.

What is the required mind set?

- Having the desire to learn.
- Being a self-starter.
- Having an aptitude for quality and detail
- Be committed to meet deadlines and work under minimal guidance.
- Intrinsic talent is one of the key thing besides the commitment.
- The ability to take constructive criticism can take you far in this profession.
- The ability to give feedback without seeming condescending especially when you working in a team.
- Exposure to technology and your own desire to learn can get you far in the industry.

Christopher Erdhardt, founder of the Indian School of Gaming says what the gaming industry needs is “Nerds. No, seriously, math geeks taht are fans of games other than Counter-strike and NFS. Remember that the bulk of games sold in the USA and UK are family-friendly casual games. so someone open to new types of games excels.” Game design is where most gamers would jump for. This requires a far more subtler skill. Rajesh from Dhruva illustrates, “If you’ve played a lot of games from beginning to end, you start understanding the ladder of challenge. You understand the different learning curves for different kinds of games. For instance, as a writer, it helps if you did a lot of reading in your formative years. It works exactly the same way wit gaming. You can’t have a guy who has spent years in the creative department of an advertising agency pop-out and say he’ll design a game. This sort of person would stick to a linear form of story telling and gaming has gone beyond this.”

It’s different disciplines. Individual contributor is mainly it for the first couple of years. Then highly specialized contributors then mentors and mangers, assistant leaders, project management etc.

Compensation

Early on, it could be approximately Rs. 10,000-15,000. Further, Rs. 20,000-40,000 or so in 2 years and anywhere between Rs. 40,000 to 50,000 in the fourth year. Rs. 50,000 to 70,000 from 5th year onwards. Please note: These figures do not represent the compensation package of any one company. It is an approximate based on discussions with experts across companies.

Mid-career changes

According to Rao, “Programmers do not exactly change careers after sometime. While we do notice depending on the interest that designers and artists make a switch. Sometimes designers take up arts and the other way around.”

Institutes offering Animation and Game-related courses

- Academy of Animation and Gaming, Noida
- AIGA – Asian Institute of Gaming and Animation, Bangalore
- Animaster, Bangalore
- Ants Studio Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore
- Aptech Limited (Arena Animation), Mumbai
- Arena Animation, Indore
- Arena Multimedia Park Street, Kolkatta
- Dsk Superinfocom International Campus, Pune
- Frameboxx Animation | Visual Effects, Mumbai
- Gecko Animation Studio, New Delhi
- Image College of Arts, Animation & Technology, Chennai
- Industrial Design Centre, IIT Mumbai
- Indian School of Gaming, Hyderabad
- MAAC, Mumbai
- Manipal University, Karnataka
- National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad

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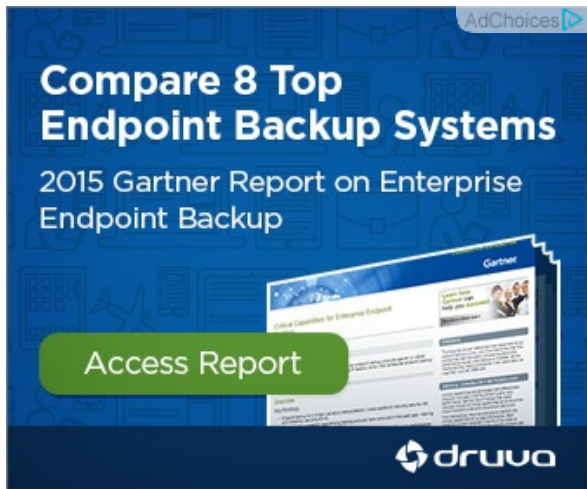
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