

INDIE PERSPECTIVE: XONA GAMES' MATTHEW DOUCETTE ON THE ISSUE FACING ALL STUDIOS

THE CHALLENGES FOR Canada are the same everywhere. When you look at the top retail games each year there are plagued with sequels.

In the top 20 retail games starting on the Xbox 360 in 2012, only three were not sequels. I believe the solution lays in the innovation that only indie studios offer. I can foresee a great change in the gaming landscape. The next pressing issue is how to market the enormous onslaught of indie games to find the gems. Everyone is doing it wrong, from Steam, to Xbox LIVE, and especially the App Store. However, Steam is

on the verge of some great solutions. Canada is famous for its tax breaks but while subsidies are very much appreciated, since making games has been a passion for Jason and I for 30 years, they are ultimately icing on the cake. As an indie studio there are many financial concerns, the biggest is just simply surviving at all. The tax breaks will come into greater meaning for us as we continue to succeed.

As an indie studio we would put government support at the top of the list, above tax breaks. NSBI and its subsidiaries have been amazingly supportive.

AN EX-PAT SPEAKS: HB STUDIOS FOUNDER JEREMY WELLARD ON SWITCHING HOMES

"I MISS LONDON, my hometown, but the quality of life here is really rather special."

You hear that a lot from UK ex-pats who have hopped oceans to set up games businesses in Canada.

HB Studios CEO and founder Jeremy Wellard made the switch a decade ago – before tax breaks came to Nova Scotia, and before the Canadian games development boom became headline material. But not much has changed in that time, except the higher profile.

"Generally games developers are a young crowd and Canada, in all its diversity, offers a

fantastic lifestyle for that age group," says Wellard.

For the studio founder, the challenge isn't around games subsidies, it's hiring staff: "The biggest challenge in Nova Scotia is currently recruitment. Every development studio in the country seems to be recruiting. Available Canadian developers are very difficult to find and the current, right-leaning federal government has been increasing the restrictions around bringing in foreign workers. We have had to turn down projects because we cannot find software engineers quickly enough."

Q&A: LONGTAIL STUDIOS

The studio's executive producer John Jennings on tax breaks, talent and national trends

Are tax breaks important to your studio?

They certainly allow us to remain competitive with other developers, but they're not the be all and end all that our publisher looks for when choosing to work with a studio.

Are there any other key industry trends particularly apparent in Canada today?

Of course, we're seeing the same boom in iOS and Android micro-studios appearing throughout the country, even here in Halifax and throughout the Maritimes.

What makes Canada appealing to those from other countries pondering a move for work?

There isn't really 'one culture'. Due to its sheer size, there's great diversity in the country, geographically and culturally, so it can appeal to almost anybody. East, West and Central Canada all feel very different. Immigration is also relatively easy, in comparison to entering the US or Europe. In addition, the Canadian Economy hasn't suffered in the same way as the economies of Europe and the USA, making it easier for families

Nova Scotia

TRADE BODY Q&A: Nova Scotia Business Inc



Suzanne Diab

Matthew Doucette

Develop speaks to, Suzanne Diab, NSBI's Marketing and Communications Advisor, about supporting a cluster away from the big Canada cities

How is your organisation involved in the Canadian Games industry?

Nova Scotia Business Inc. is Nova Scotia's business development agency. Five years ago we identified the games development sector as a key opportunity for Nova Scotia, and now we are home to a thriving base of local companies in the digital media sector – HB Studios, Fourth Monkey Media, Silverback Productions, and many more.

Just recently, we attracted Frontier Developments to our province, the studio behind titles like *Kinectimals* and *LostWinds*. They selected Nova Scotia for its first North American location.

Why is the province so strong as a games development destination?

Nova Scotia offers several key advantages including cost-competitive operating costs, an educated and loyal labour pool, a strategic nearshore location to the US and Europe, financial incentives, a world-class infrastructure and a growing ICT sector.

According to KPMG's 2012 Competitive Alternatives report Halifax ranks number one for cost competitiveness in video games production out of all global mature markets surveyed, and is in the top ten out of all global mature and developing markets.

Halifax was also ranked as number one for operating costs when compared to key sector cities in Canada, the US and Europe in the software development sector.

Nova Scotia is Canada's university capital and is home to ten universities and 13 community college campuses. And according to Statistics Canada, Nova Scotia has on average, over the last five years, 16

per cent more ICT grads per capita than the Canadian average.

Speciality degrees relating directly to industry needs are offered throughout the province. These include Graphics, Gaming and Media, Artificial Intelligence and Intelligent Systems, Communications Technologies and Cyber Security, as well as SAP Software Expertise.

What about key games industry trends apparent in Nova Scotia today?

The industry in the province is growing in diversity and a lot of the games development skills are being applied in other industries across the province.

A recent study by Nordicity (2013) says that the majority of interactive media firms in Nova Scotia are generating revenue by developing products and services in education, training, simulation and gaming, with most work being done on proprietary platforms, and various mobile or web-based platforms.

How are those from outside Nova Scotia and Canada supported in moving to the province to work in games?

We have a team of labour strategists on hand that works closely with provincial departments like the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. That office is also active in recruiting, and they attend international recruitment events focused on the digital gaming sector.

In addition to attracting people to the province, Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS) is the region's leading community organisation.