

## Market booms for digital media grads

Many companies are looking for people ready to step into management

**Marke Andrews**

Vancouver Sun

*Tuesday, February 19, 2008*

The first students in the Masters of Digital Media program at the brand new Great Northern Way Campus won't graduate with their masters degrees until 2009. That is, if they're not tempted to leave school early for British Columbia's talent-hungry digital media job market.

There are more than 1,100 digital media companies in the province, most of those in the Lower Mainland, employing more than 15,000 people. These range from small companies with one to five employees, to big operations like EA Canada, with 1,900 workers. The majority of these companies are looking for new employees, and are especially interested in people who can step into management positions.

That's where MDM comes in. It is the only graduate degree program of its kind in the country, and the 21 students, who come from Canada, the U.S., China, India, Cyprus and Egypt, are being trained so that when they leave the school they are able to work as managers in established companies, or start their own digital media firms.

"The MDM program was created because of this very issue," stated Gerri Sinclair, executive director of the MDM program, in an e-mail interview. She says many digital companies in Vancouver had lobbied the provincial government to set up a graduate school.

"Their concern was that the current system graduated very talented people in their respective fields of computer graphics or programming, but these new grads lacked the team-based collaborative skill set required to become high-performance members of a digital media project team," said Sinclair.

"The Masters of Digital Media program is an MBA in digital media," said Sinclair. "Our Foundations of Digital Media course covers the entire spectrum of business and management in the digital media industry. In addition, more than three dozen industry experts were invited to visit our campus and give lectures to our students on the various roles, career paths, and entrepreneurial opportunities within the industry.

"Next semester we will offer courses on intellectual property, and the commercialization of technology. In short, we are providing students the grounding needed to successfully manage within an existing company or to start their own."

An undergraduate degree is a requirement for the program, and the 21 students have degrees ranging from computer science to philosophy.

MDM opened its Great Northern Way Campus doors in September. The campus is an initiative jointly backed by the University of B.C., Simon Fraser University, the B.C. Institute of Technology and Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design, all of which accredit the masters degree earned at MDM. In February 2006, the provincial government gave \$40.5 million to the campus.

Corporations have also kicked in funds. Last May, Electronic Arts donated \$1 million toward scholarships, internships, guest lecturers and future operation of the program. The school's Industry Affiliate program promotes industry and academic collaboration, allowing corporations to help shape the curriculum. In addition to EA's contribution, Autodesk, Propaganda Games, Rainmaker, NBC/Universal, Radical Entertainment,

Nokia, Sun Microsystems and Vivendi Games have all contributed.

Most recently, Microsoft Canada and SevenGroup set up the Windows Compute Cluster Server to allow students to render digital content more quickly. A process that would take two hours on their laptops can now be done in five minutes.

The 20-month MDM program is far from an Ivory Tower environment. Students work on real-world, industry-funded projects, which they must deliver on time and on budget. Two current student projects are a 3D virtual ride on the Canada Line, where the online rider can pass through tunnels and arrive at stations, and a 3D visualization of a sustainable ocean ecosystem, created from data supplied by the Fisheries Centre at UBC.

As part of the Canada Line project, Jean Marc Arbaud, CEO of Intransit, visited the campus to speak with students.

Students also receive paid summer internships. To date, more than 30 companies have offered internships. Most of these are in B.C., but there have also been offers from companies in Montreal, California, Barcelona and Singapore.

"I am certain that each one of our grads will have no difficulty finding an exciting, challenging, and rewarding position in B.C. or anywhere else in the world," said Sinclair. "I hope they will stay here and help grow our thriving industry, but if the truth be known, they will be a hot commodity worldwide."

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**RECRUITMENT** | Many companies are looking for people ready to step into management

BY MARKE ANDREWS  
VANCOUVER SUN

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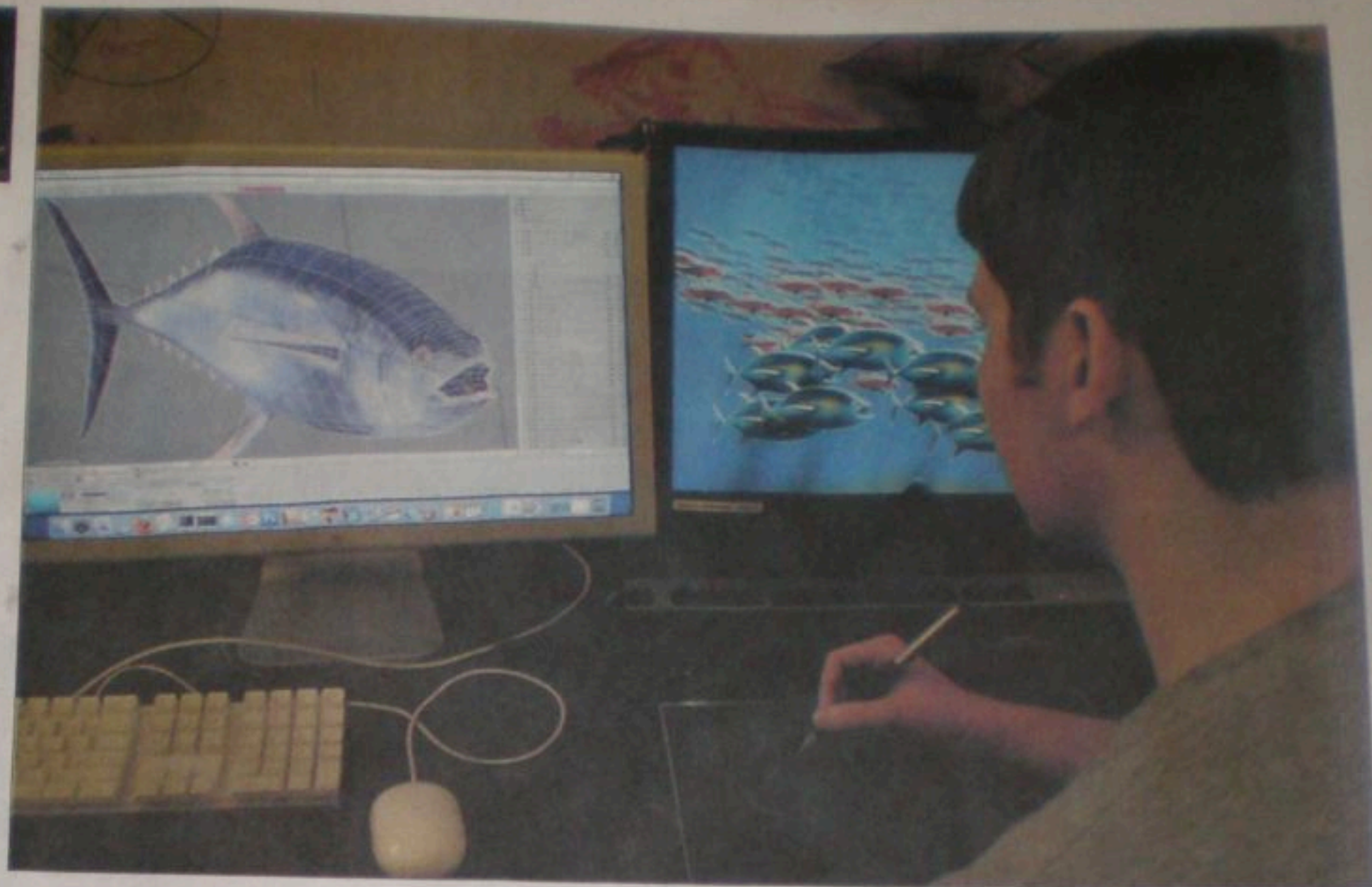
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Students work at Vancouver's Centre for Digital Media (above and below); the centre is also shown top left.



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