

Preparing Students for Job Hunting in the High-End CG Industries

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Abstract

Schools have gotten much better at educating students in the technical and academic skills necessary to succeed in careers in high-end computer graphics. Of course before an individual can succeed in a career, they must find employment. Unfortunately, many academic institutions do not supply their students with the tools necessary to find that first job.

This panel will address what those tools are and how important they are to an individual's success in obtaining employment. Skills to be addressed will range from researching prospective employers, what makes a winning demo reel and resume, self promotion and interview and negotiation skills.

Panelists will include professionals who earn their keep in these industries; recruiters, production supervisors, and executives. These are the people who decide those who get interviewed and those who don't. They are all also actively involved in education.

1 Purpose and Premise

The purpose of this panel is to outline for educators and students what personal marketing, job hunting, research, interview and negotiation skills are necessary to find employment in the high-end computer graphics industries. This session is intended for anyone involved in teaching, curriculum or program development and student counseling in digital media programs. Students would also benefit from this discussion.

The production professionals who make up this panel will work to impress upon educators and students the importance of research, self-promotion, written and verbal communication, interviewing and negotiation skills. Panel members are all involved in the hiring of artists on a daily basis. They are well aware of what makes one applicant stand out from the crowd and why certain individuals get interviewed/hired and why others don't. They are also involved in and understand education.

In their presentations they will outline their personal experiences in recruiting and hiring. They will detail what tools today's job seekers need to find the right company for their skills and to get their foot in the door.

Pointed questions will be aimed at clarifying what the right tools are. Discussion will address specifics on what abilities prospective artists need to develop and possible ways of inserting them into current digital media education.

There will be time for questions at the end of the session.

2 The Panelists

Pam Hogarth, [moderator] Director of Industry Relations, has been in the world of computer graphics for over 20 years. In that time she has done marketing, public and industry relations, and training for a wide range of companies and educational institutions. She has taught at The American Film Institute, Otis College of Art and Design, and Digital Media Institute (where she was Director) and has lectured on computer graphics, digital careers and visual effects at various international conferences here and abroad. Pam has twice been elected to the Board of Directors of the Visual Effects Society. She has served as Co-Chair of the VES Education Committee and is co-founder and steering committee member of the Alliance of Digital Effects Production Trainers (ADEPT). She served two years on the Computer Animation Festival committee for the SIGGRAPH convention and coordinated three sessions for last year's Educators Program. She holds a BS in Fine Art from Springfield College and an MED in Vocational Counseling from Kent State University.

"In my role as Director of Industry Relations, I spend much of my time talking to recruiters in the high-end cg community. These professionals regularly recount horror stories about students who have spent years studying cg, but don't have any idea how to find a job. Graduates need to know how to research employers, write a literate cover letter, proof read a resume and speak intelligently during an interview to get that first job."

Debra Blanchard has been Recruiting Supervisor at DreamWorks for the past three years. After graduating from San Diego State with a degree in film, she went to work at Warner Bros. Television Animation. While there she worked on "Tiny Toons Adventures", for which she wrote several episodes. Debra began her recruiting career at Industrial Light & Magic.

"My job as Artistic Recruiter is all about finding the right person for each position at DreamWorks. It is so painful for me to see extremely talented artists who don't have the tools they need to market themselves or perform well in an interview. A complete education needs to include training students in how to find a job."

Kathleen Milnes, Senior Vice President, Workforce and Economic Development, Entertainment Industry Development Corporation. Kathleen's primary responsibility is to help create/guide educational programs that meet the needs of the entertainment industries. Prior to joining EIDC in October 1997, Milnes served as Vice President of the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) for seven years. From 1983 until 1990, she served as Deputy Director of the California Film Commission.

Milnes has a B.A. in American Studies from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She is an adjunct professor in the

Digital Media Department at the Otis College of Art. As a speaker, panelist, or moderator, Milnes has presented at conferences sponsored by the California Association for Local Economic Development, the California Workforce Association, the California Department of Education, the California Community Colleges, and SIGGRAPH.

“While artistic talent is key, students need much more to be successful in digital media. They need to understand how extensive these industries are and how many different segments hire digital artists, how to manage their finances, how to research opportunities and find the hiring managers, how to present themselves to potential employers, and all the other general career and personal management skills necessary to succeed in any field ~ with the specialized "twist" of the entertainment and media industries.”

Barbara McCullough Recruiting Manager for Rhythm & Hues Studios, is a veteran of the film industry. She has worked at top digital animation and visual effects studios including, PDI, Digital Domain, DreamWorks Feature Animation and Rhythm & Hues in Production Management.

The breadth of her experience has provided her with insight and understanding of the skills and challenges required by our industry. Her efforts have grown the outreach of Rhythm & Hues' recruiting department and facilitated the identification of new and exciting talent.

“I am deeply interested in assisting students aspiring to transition to the professional world. Making sure they have the tools they need to make that transition is vital.”

Stan Szymanski's experience covers a wide range of visual effects experience on the creative, managerial and administrative sides of the business, including stints as a department manager, visual effects producer, and production manager of the largest department at Sony Pictures Imageworks. His department includes computer graphics supervisors and digital artists of all types. Before joining Sony Pictures Imageworks, Stan was Director of Operations for Pacific Ocean Post, where he supervised the digital film division and line-produced the digital post-production of over 200 visual effects. Prior to this, Stan served in a variety of roles for MetroLight Studios, a CGI production company. He started as the Digital Production Manager, quickly expanded his role to include post production supervision and was later named Director of Production. Stan began his career in the Los Angeles visual effects industry as a Graphics and Effects Producer for Editel/LA.

“Students seeking employment opportunities in today's CG industries should strive to honest appraisals of their skills with the reality of current (and future) market needs. This involves ongoing and reality-based assessment of their individual strengths and weaknesses; constant honing and refinement of key presentation materials; continuous appraisals of the trends and opportunities in the rapid technology, art and stylistic shifts of the CG market. In other words, don't let a single focus or approach limit your opportunities - especially if that focus is out of sync with current employment needs.

Always seek to tailor your skills to the current needs of industry and always think in terms of career path and growth - if you can't get your dream job today, think about how can you build toward that job over the next few years.”

Peter Grassi, Artistic Recruiter, Electronic Arts, Los Angeles. A graduate of the Theater Arts program of Santa Clara University, Peter entered the field of digital graphics as a Technical Artist for Metropolis Digital in 1993. Peter continued his technical development as an in-house Technical Editor for Xaos Inc., the pioneering graphics facility that developed proprietary particle

and effects software under Xaos Tools. His experience managing artists led to a role in production management on *Shrek* for PDI. For two years, he helped manage the team of texture artists and modelers that were responsible for building the photo-real environments and characters in the award-winning production. After DreamWorks, Peter went on to become an Executive Account Manager for Ice Pond Studio, in New York. His work culminated in his current position as Senior Art Recruiter for EA Los Angeles.

“In my role as Senior Art Recruiter, I am responsible for sourcing key contributors in the areas of Game Design, Animation/Art and Production Design from the Interactive, Film and Collegiate communities. As Electronic Arts is a leading evolving technology company with proprietary tools for advanced game development, I specifically recruit individuals with a deep artistic and technical foundation for future growth.”

Jeff Hazelton, President, BioLucid Productions, the quality leader in the creation of 3D cinematic animation for the Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical marketplace. Using the latest special effects technology and techniques, BioLucid prides itself on both the scientific accuracy of the animations they produce as well as the clarity and attractive style of the finished animation.

BioLucid has been creating cutting edge animation for three years for all different types of BioTechnology and Pharmaceutical clients, from small start ups to big pharma. Jeff Hazelton, the founder of BioLucid, has been creating medical animation since 1995. Jeff is supported by a full-time staff of highly trained 3D animators, and also works with music composers and sound effects artists to elevate both the audio and visual presentations they create to new levels with each subsequent project.

“Students who wish to find a rewarding job in high-end CG must first display the commitment and skills required, as well as the interest level to carry them through the times ahead. These skills require the individual have strong collaborative skills in addition to a high level of artistic and technical ability. Versatility is something that will always work to a student's advantage, so I would recommend broadening one's capabilities to the greatest extent possible. Often what a student focuses on in school will not be applicable to their first opportunity in the real world, if so than that is a very fortunate coincidence.”

Robin Thompkins currently consulting at Electronic Arts Los Angeles as a Senior Staffing Specialist in charge of hiring art talent, in addition to EALA's internship program. Prior to EA, as a consultant at Digital Domain in Venice, Robin supervised the hiring of Visual Effects Supervisors and Senior Inferno Artists for DD's commercial division. She was appointed senior staffing manager at Cinesite Hollywood in 2001. At Sony Pictures Imageworks in Culver City, Robin was director of staffing - responsible for supervising a world-wide recruiting effort. In her six years at Imageworks, Thompkins filled more than 200 core staff positions and numerous hires for specific films.

As a staffing consultant and corporate recruiter, Robin's clients included Sun America, Canon Information Systems and The Walt Disney Company. Robin has been certified by the American Management Association (AMA) in fundamentals of human resource management.

“As a Senior Recruiter in both the VFX and Game industries, when it comes to students, I'm always surprised that they rely on their talent and accomplishments in art and technology to carry them through the interview process. Students need to consider the interview as interactive, which means they need to research the proper questions to ask. This helps us to determine their professional maturity and their ability to work on production teams with challenging deadlines.