

For high pay, try video-game industry

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The Entertainment Software Association says average compensation is about \$97,000 a year.



(Photo: Patrick Breen/azcentral sports)

Maybe all those hours your kids spent playing video games weren't wasted after all.

The American video-game industry now employs roughly 65,700 workers in relatively high-paying jobs, including nearly 1,200 in Arizona, according to a new study that sees continuing solid growth, especially as virtual reality catches on.

The Entertainment Software Association pegged average compensation, both nationally and in Arizona, at around \$97,000 a year, with \$83,000 in wages and the rest in employer contributions to retirement programs, insurance, Social Security, Medicare and so on. The report portrays the industry as highly decentralized, with developers and other businesses spread among all 50 states.

Still, California accounts for more than half of all jobs, with 35,325, followed by Washington state at 6,166, Texas at 4,883 and New York at 4,675. The report didn't rank states below the top seven, which Arizona didn't make.

"Employees in the U.S. video game industry may work in small game-developer shops or in large game-publishing companies with thousands of employees," said the report, which can be viewed at theESA.com. (<http://theESA.com>.) "They may be employed as programmers, arts and animation specialists, game designers, game-production experts, quality-assurance personnel, audio specialists, legal staff members or business and marketing personnel."

Game-developing companies, which account for most businesses in the field, often specialize in games for specific platforms including mobile, handheld devices and online media, according to the report. Rainbow Studios of Phoenix is among the largest Arizona companies in the field, according to the association.

Evolution of the industry

Video games have evolved into a mass medium, with more than 150 million Americans playing, according to the Entertainment Software Association. The average gamer is 35 years old, with 73 percent age 18 or older. Some 41 percent are women.

Popular games include Battlefield, Bloodborne, Madden NFL 17, Grand Theft Auto V, Pokémon Go, Call of Duty, Infinite Warrior and MLB 15. The three top genres are action, first-person shooters and sports.

More than 400 U.S. colleges and universities now offer coursework in programming, graphic design and other disciplines that students use in the video-gaming industry. The list of educational institutions in Arizona ranges from Arizona State University and Mesa Community College to the Art Institute of Phoenix, DeVry University and the University of Advancing Technology in Tempe.

"The interactive-entertainment industry is powered by real jobs that develop the most innovative and remarkable technology and entertainment in the world," said Michael Gallagher, president and CEO of the Entertainment Software Association, in a statement. "These high-paying, creative careers build communities all across the U.S."

The association counts 46 video-game companies in Arizona and estimated they generate \$88 million in annual revenue, or less than 1 percent of the \$24.5 billion total nationally. The U.S. revenue total rose 47 percent over the past five years.

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