

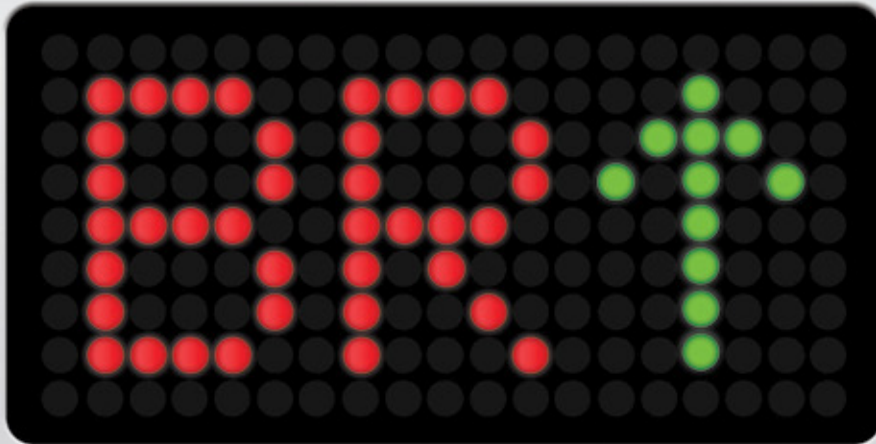
# Baton Rouge Area Advances

to the

# NEXT LEVEL

Louisiana Digital Media Center gives EA local roots





When the Baton Rouge Area Digital Industries Consortium (BRADIC) was formed in 2007, its founders knew that creating the much-needed infrastructure, be it human or structural, to accentuate the state's aggressive tax incentives would be critical in attracting and retaining the world's leading digital interactive media companies. Upon its completion in late 2012, the Louisiana Digital Media Center will accomplish a major aspect of that goal.

Currently under construction on the campus of Louisiana State University (LSU), the 94,000-square-foot building will be the new home of Electronic Arts' (EA's) Baton Rouge division and the LSU Center for Computation and Technology (CCT). In order to assist in the industry sector's talent development, the building was designed specifically to encourage cross-collaboration between company employees and students, which will nurture shared ideas and assistance.

The third floor of the Louisiana Digital Media Center will be leased by EA's North American Testing Center (NATC) until 2022, while the second floor will house the offices and labs of LSU CCT. Meanwhile, the ground floor will feature a four-hundred-seat, state-of-the-art auditorium,

as well as a coffee shop and gathering spaces. The center will be located between the John M. Parker Coliseum and the Louisiana Emerging Technology Center on the southeast corner of LSU's campus.

The EA/Baton Rouge area story began after an initial EA visit in 2006. Their interest was focused on developing a quality assurance division that would consolidate and expand their existing testing facilities, currently scattered among multiple locations and teams. However, before they could commit, they needed access to a building that would provide them with the high-tech tools and technology needed to be successful in the digital media industry including a fiber optic line and a large digital projector.



Photo Credit: Coleman Partners Architects

In 2007, after intense recruitment efforts by BRAC, BRADIC, and other local partners, EA agreed to develop their NATC in the Capital Region. In return, LSU and the state of Louisiana promised to build the Louisiana Digital Media Center. In September 2008, EA opened a temporary testing center on LSU's South Campus, where it will stay until the completion of the new center in late 2012.

The NATC tests nearly every North American product released on all of EA's current platforms including computer games, consoles, handheld units, and mobile games. Testers work with the development team to find flaws in the games and remove bugs. The Baton Rouge area is a prime location for this type of work because of the large student population. Students in the Capital Region generally have an affinity for sports-related games, which account for a large segment of EA's product line. EA places a high priority on the accuracy of the user's experience and strives for its products to simulate the actual experience as closely as possible, utilizing the latest technology. Executives knew they could recruit talented testers locally who could accurately pinpoint areas where the user experience was off.

Currently, EA employs four hundred workers in the Baton Rouge area and one-third of them are students.

This number is expected to rise as the two groups continue to work closely together. The total EA job count for the facility, once complete, is expected to be near six hundred.

In 2009, LSU CCT launched the Arts, Visualization, Advanced Technologies, and Research (AVATAR) initiative. After a two-year development process, the program now offers students the opportunity to receive a minor in digital media. In May 2012, the first class of students with this minor will graduate. According to LSU, AVATAR was created to "establish a faculty focus on the intersections between the arts, technology, and computational sciences with scholars from across the university, including the Schools of Art, Music, Landscape Architecture and Mass Communication, Departments of Computer Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, and English, and the Center for Computation & Technology."

Upon inception, it was expected that only fifteen to twenty students would enroll. Actual enrollment the first year was fifty students. Additionally, in August of 2012, a master's program will be added. The AVATAR program serves as a reminder of the commitment to digital media in the Baton Rouge area and continues to foster the development of this ecosystem.

Despite a successful launch, AVATAR needed a corporate sponsor to develop its full potential. LSU needed a partner who could take the lead and demonstrate the full capabilities of the industry, as well as provide access to the cutting-edge technology. EA understood this need and has a history of commitment to education. In each city where they have a presence, EA works closely with the local university. The company is currently very active with both the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

The building was brought to fruition through a joint effort between EA, BRAC, BRADIC, LSU, and Louisiana Economic Development (LED). Together these groups worked through the myriad of hurdles presented when

constructing a building of this size and quality. The \$29.3 million project will be developed with the state contributing \$26.3 million and a \$3 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

While many companies continue to seek out the next great incentive in their expansion and relocation efforts, EA has established roots in Louisiana. Additionally, LSU has gained a talented and successful partner for the further development and continued success of the AVATAR program. Finally, the digital media ecosystem in the Baton Rouge area has taken a giant step forward as these partners work together to collaborate and create cutting edge technologies and solidify the region as a digital media hub. ✨



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