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THE PLACE WHERE INDUSTRIES CONVERGE

Orlando, Florida, is in the business of bringing together companies for unique results.

Julie Hunt

There's something the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission (EDC) wants everyone to know: There's more to Orlando than theme parks and entertainment.

"Half of our battle is working to balance the image of Orlando," says John Fremstad, vice president of technology industry development for the EDC. "We have a good image — when you think of Orlando, you think of Disney, business conventions — all positive, but there's more to it than that."



Fremstad

For starters, technology and, specifically, the digital media industry sector, is growing significantly in Orlando. "We've already got the infrastructure in place to make it happen," says Jackie Kelvington, a consultant to the EDC. "We have entertainment giants and a growing technology sector, so the coming together of those industries just makes sense in a place like Orlando." As a result, "Sports and game technology is really taking off," notes Kelvington.

An example of this is the powerful connection the EDC helped garner between Electronic Arts (EA) and the University of Central Florida (UCF). EA's Tiburon studios needed to expand, but its biggest issue was the supply of workforce. The company wanted to hire 75 percent of its workforce locally, but at the time it was recruiting 75 percent from outside of Orlando.



Electronic Arts recently expanded its Tiburon Studios in metro Orlando, Florida. As part of the expansion deal, the University of Central Florida agreed to start a school geared toward students of digital media.

"As part of its Orlando expansion, EA worked with the University of Central Florida to build a school that specifically nurtures students in digital media," Kelvington explains.

Doors to the new school are opening in September. "It's a downtown campus," explains Fremstad. "They took an old Expo center and blew it out so there's incubation space for small digital media or entertainment technology companies." The new UCF school, called the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy, is one of the few of its kind in the country to provide specific curricula and training in the growing digital arts field. The expansion is expected to create 650 new jobs and \$8.4 million in capital investment over the next few years.

Another EDC coup is the \$170 million JetBlue Airways deal. The New York-based airline opened JetBlue University in Orlando; the school trains all of its employees at the campus, and it is planning to build an exclusive hotel for its employees in Orlando as well. There are two divisions: a live DirecTV hangar (JetBlue has a television set in every seat) and simulation training facility.

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"Orlando's airport is an easy place to travel and it has room to expand, so JetBlue saw it as a good place to move their people in and out of the city," says Fremstad. Once again, UCF was involved in the deal. "UCF was willing to move and create a research partnership and class work. The advantage that UCF has is that it's relatively young, and it's willing to change curriculum to produce graduates. That was a big deal for JetBlue."



JetBlue Airways opened a new training and maintenance facility in Orlando, Florida; all of the company's employees are trained at the campus.

Additionally, Orlando's downtown is going through a phenomenal revitalization — there are seven mixed-use high-rises in the pipeline. One of these new buildings belongs to Dynetech Corporation, which is building a new headquarters in downtown Orlando that will have a mix of uses.

"There is \$1.5 billion worth of construction going on — new office complexes, condos, retail, you name it," says Kelvington. "It really is breathing new life into the city core. It's making a huge difference. Orlando's city proper is changing; more people are living downtown."

"Growth is unbelievable," notes Fremstad. "In 1960, Orlando was a little under 100,000 people. It's now 2 million people, and another 500,000 to 800,000 people are coming."

With new people comes new business, and as with all economic development organizations, the Metro Orlando EDC is committed to bringing new business to the city. But Fremstad is quick to note that Orlando is looking for the right businesses, not just any company. "We're targeting industries that bring high wage jobs and complement our diverse and growing clusters in industries such as optics, simulation, software and financial services, to name a few."

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