

Canada basks in role as global special effects hub

January 26 2012, by Laurent Vu The

Canada's westernmost province of British Columbia, one of the top regions for filmmaking outside of Hollywood, is rapidly gaining prominence as a world leader in animation and special effects.

Whether it's creating a car chase that erupts in an explosion or conjuring up a bloody battle scene thronging with warriors, [Canada](#) -- and especially this region sometimes called "Hollywood North" -- is increasingly where movie studios are turning.

Business is booming with more than enough work to go around despite fierce competition among studios vying for contracts and talent.

According to the movie industry bible the Hollywood Reporter magazine, more than 2,000 people are employed by the special effects trade in Vancouver -- a figure likely to grow by several hundred by year's end.

The majority of clients are major American studios, some of whom first came to the area to avoid the 2008 Hollywood writers strike and the US economic crisis, and were then happy enough with what they found here to stick around.

Some have even opened up their own subsidiaries here. Famed American film studios likes Pixar, [Sony Pictures](#) Imagework are among the Hollywood companies to create Canadian outposts in the Vancouver area.

The American companies are lured by a local tax break of 17.5% and various other incentives tailored to attracting special effects and [computer animation](#) projects in British Columbia.

The government here first began offering a bundle of [tax incentives](#) in 2003 to woo the then-nascent special effects and animation production industry.

The favorable tax terms serve as a magnet for what is now a thriving industry, which works on some 250 films each year and provides employment for about 30,000 local workers.

Robert Wong, vice president for Tax Credits and Development at the non-profit British Columbia Film and Media, told AFP that while there were only seven productions that applied for the tax credit in 2004, there were 174 last year, valued at around 1.6 billion Canadian dollars.

-- Demand is so great --

And Richard Brownsey, president of the local film society, said the meteoric growth is likely to only continue.

"It's a virtuous circle," he said, adding the "professionalism, quality of work, tax refunds encourage studios to do their post-production here. It is creating more jobs."

Meanwhile, the Canadian branch of Zoic Studio, a visual effects company in Los Angeles, says there is no end to the amount of work and the varying nature of the projects -- including work for the small screen.

"From concept alien spacecraft to the creation of virtual sets, we will achieve all the visual effects of the second season of 'Falling Skies'," the sci-fi television series from Steven Spielberg, says Ralph Maiers, [special](#)

[effects](#) supervisor for the company.

"We have plenty of work to do," he said.

So plentiful is the work here that Zoic plans to double its workforce, currently 50 artists, by the end of the year, said company CEO Patrick Mooney.

But he said there is a fierce fight to find talented workers, with so many companies vying for workers from a finite labor pool

It "has probably never been more difficult to recruit" because the demand is so great, he said.

2010 saw a hiccup in the industry, with spending by foreign production companies down seven percent, raising concerns in some quarters.

But Karen Lamare, responsible for planning and communication for regional film production here, sees no reason to panic about the influx of new projects.

Despite occasional fluctuations, "we've been steady," with demand from clients, she said.

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