

Microsoft to open training hub in Canada

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Microsoft is creating a new training and development center in Vancouver, British Columbia, focused largely on Office, Bing, Skype and MSN, that eventually could create 400 new jobs.

The center, being called the "Microsoft Canada Excellence Centre," is expected to open late next year in the Pacific Centre shopping mall, above a Nordstrom store, in downtown Vancouver.

With the move, Microsoft will be roughly doubling the number of people it employs in Vancouver.

Microsoft said it expects to spend about \$90 million a year on the center, with the bulk of that money going toward the lease and employee salaries and benefits.

Vancouver has been establishing itself as a hot new tech hub, taking advantage of Canada's generous tax benefits, more flexible immigration rules - with a faster visa process than in the U.S. - and relatively abundant supply of engineers.

The creation of Microsoft's new facility "is more important validation of Vancouver's continued emergence as a world-leading hub for innovation, with unprecedented new investment and job creation in our fast-growing digital-technology sector," Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson said in a news release.

The center will focus mainly on training people who will go into research and development with Microsoft's Applications and Services Group. That group is responsible for Office, Office 365, SharePoint, Exchange, Yammer, Lync, Skype, Bing, Bing Apps, MSN and Microsoft Advertising platforms.

Microsoft plans to start hiring the first of its employees for the center this summer, focusing on software and services engineering and program and solutions management for the Applications and Services Group.

The company will lease 143,000 square feet on two of the four levels of office space above Nordstrom's future Canadian flagship location, according to Cadillac Fairview, which owns and manages Pacific Centre.

Microsoft also said Thursday it's establishing the "Foundry Vancouver" paid internship program. The 16-week program, which launches this summer, gives development and design students at Canadian universities the opportunity to build applications for Microsoft's platforms and devices.

No tax breaks were involved in the deal to open the new training and development center in Vancouver, Microsoft spokesman David Cuddy

said.

Microsoft already has a sizable presence in Vancouver, with more than 300 employees working largely in game and entertainment development there at studios including BigPark and Black Tusk.

In 2007, Microsoft had also opened what it alternately called the Canada Development Centre and the Vancouver Development Center in the Vancouver suburb of Richmond.

The center, opened in part to accommodate workers it was recruiting from overseas but which evolved into a general development center, has since been consolidated with Microsoft's other facilities in Vancouver.

Microsoft says that more than 80 percent of its employees in Canada currently are Canadian citizens, and that the new Excellence Centre it's opening will employ both Canadian nationals as well as those hired from overseas.

"The focus is on hiring the best people," Cuddy said.

Once the remodel at Pacific Centre is complete, all of Microsoft's employees in Vancouver - including those working at its games studios - will move into the Excellence Centre.

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