



GAME GON

Being a videogame producer isn't all fun and games — but it's pretty close.

IF YOU WANT A JOB LIKE JOHN DAY'S, you have to really love videogames. You need to know about different kinds of games, how they work and what makes them fun. You should also be able to understand computers, communicate with people and work hard.

And owning a few Nerf guns doesn't hurt, either.

As a videogame producer, John Day has created popular games such as "Meet the Robinsons," "Cars 2" and "Toy Story 3." His current project is "Disney Infinity," an open-world game releasing in June. Day also organizes videogame tournaments with co-workers and uses his eight Nerf guns at work — and nobody gets in trouble for it.

At Avalanche Software in Salt Lake City, Utah, Nerf wars and game tournaments might not be in Day's official job description, but when you're making videogames, creativity and fun are important. **CONTINUED >>>**

In the new Disney Infinity game, you can bring together characters from different movies to create your own world.

By Kaylie Astin

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Sparks fly and vehicles crash in the *Cars 2* videogame.

Building a Foundation

As a kid, Day spent lots of time playing videogames, but getting game ideas from his imagination to the screen requires plenty of technical know-how, too. Luckily for Day, his father worked in the computer industry and shared his expertise.

"I built my first PC when I was 11," Day says, "and I never really stopped."

Even so, Day's father wasn't always happy about his son's early love of videogames. "Whenever he'd catch me playing games as a kid, his trademark phrase was, 'You're never going

to amount to anything, wasting all that time on these videogames.'"

Although his knowledge of videogames paid off after all, getting his job as a producer took more than curling up with a console. Like any other student, he had to do his homework. While studying business management in college, Day also worked as a game tester.

From there, he held jobs in computer graphics research and then airline and military simulators. Both his education and job experience help him now as he comes up with new ideas, meets deadlines and solves problems.



Capt. Jack Sparrow points the way in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* portion of *Disney Infinity*.



What Does a Producer Do?

A videogame producer is in charge of a game's development from beginning to end.

"I get to be involved with the nitty-gritty of the design in the beginning," he says, "and all producers have to be designers, at least a little bit. You have to understand game design and be able to pitch some of your own."

In "Toy Story 3," for example, Day and his colleagues wanted to do more than just follow the story and characters from the movie, as many movie-based games do. So, in addition to scenes from the movie, they also created a Toy Box mode in which players could take characters through a Woody's Round-Up-style Western town, including constructing and decorating new buildings and racing Bullseye through the town with other players.

Another part of Day's job is getting things done on time and within budget.

"Ultimately, we are a deadline-driven and budget-constrained business, and we have to create a product and deliver it before a certain date, and it takes work to get there."

Sometimes that can be a challenge. Problems come up often when he's



W. GARTH DOWLING

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JOB FACTS: VIDEOGAME PRODUCER

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Since a videogame producer is in charge of a game's development, this can involve leading teams (for example, an audio team), contributing design ideas, assigning duties, maintaining a budget, enforcing deadlines, and meeting with game publishers or representatives from other companies. Some producers might also deal with marketing, testing, contracts, licensing or other aspects of selling the game.

JOB OUTLOOK:

Those who have a college degree, expertise in a certain area (such as design or engineering), several years of job experience and great communication skills have a good chance of finding a job in the fast-growing videogame industry.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE:

Videogame producers usually have a college degree in a field such as business administration, engineering or computer science. Some schools offer job-specific classes like game design or production, and some schools are dedicated to videogames (see sidebar). At least six years of industry experience is usually required before you can become a producer, so internships or entry-level jobs in the field can help. Day's education advice: "Get a degree in something pretty hard and learn how to talk to people while you're at it."

SALARY:

The median salary for a game producer is \$78,716. In entry-level jobs, the average salary is \$62,500 per year, while those with more than three years of experience earn around \$89,184 annually.

FOR MORE INFO:

Entertainment Software Association: boyslife.org/links/esa

International Game Developers Association: boyslife.org/links/igda

RECENTLY, THE PRINCETON REVIEW named the top 10 colleges specializing in videogame design. Here are the top five in the U.S. and one up-and-comer:

- **University of Utah:** In Salt Lake City, students work with artists and engineers to make games. "Minions!," Utah's last effort, got 20,000 downloads on Xbox Live. Profits went back to the game-design program.
- **University of Southern California:** Being in Los Angeles is a plus. There are lectures by big-name game professionals, and students take trips to Disney to get the scoop on animation.
- **DigiPen Institute of Technology:** Because they've been around since 1988, they really know how to educate undergraduates and graduates. Many former Microsoft and Nintendo game makers teach here. Located in Redmond, Wash., with a sister campus in Singapore.
- **Rochester Institute of Technology:** RIT offers courses in everything from calculus to 3D modeling. Students have fun, too, at events like the Humans vs. Zombies competition.
- **Massachusetts Institute of Technology:** MIT's Game Lab is led by Prof. Henry Jenkins, one of the world's foremost (and busiest) game theorists.
- **Up-and-Comer: New York University:** Spearheaded by Zynga New York co-founder Frank Lantz, the Game Center recently instituted a master's degree in game design.

— Harold Goldberg



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