

## Video game companies play up D.C.-area potential

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Maryland isn't just for biotechs.

The Old Line State has become a major hub for the growing video game sector, too.

The plethora of gaming companies in Maryland -- with quite a few in Montgomery County -- are there for the same reason so many other companies call the region home: the federal government.

Turns out all those top-secret and high-tech flight simulators are fun to play, too.

For video game companies, the government provided funding for military-simulation technologies that pretty much do what a cool video game does.

The industry "seems to have sprung up and caught everyone by surprise," says Deborah Solomon, a professor at Montgomery College in Rockville who is teaching a new gaming course and helping develop a new gaming certificate.

Several companies were launched by people who worked in government research and then decided to start their own companies. The skilled work force around the region also made it easier to start gaming companies here.

The state is home to about 40 companies, which employ more than 600 people. Most companies develop games for entertainment, but a growing number make games and products for training medical and military people and even executives.

Maryland's video sector is big, but it's a far cry from the biggest.

Boston and Austin, Texas, as well as France and South Korea, are hotbeds for gaming companies. In the United States, Maryland ranks about third or fourth in number of companies, according to Solomon.

This fact means Maryland officials have plenty of companies to call on and hopefully convince to move or expand into the region.

A company coming to Maryland would join an impressive list of businesses.

Gaithersburg-based Leaping Lizard Games, founded in 1994,

develops games for entertainment and has produced some of the most successful card and casino games in the industry. These include Magic The Gathering, Monopoly Casino and Bicycle Casino.

"Bicycle Casino has sold a higher number of copies than expected, and ESPN gambling is hot right now," says Dave Jens, senior artist for Leaping Lizard ([www.lplizard.com](http://www.lplizard.com)). "We jumped on that bandwagon before anyone else."

Video games are so much more than games these days though.

Immersion, a San Jose, Calif.-based company, is going after all the serious science taking place in the Maryland suburbs.

The company's Immersion Medical division, which is based in Gaithersburg, developed five simulators that train clinicians to perform minimally invasive endovascular, endoscopy, hysteroscopy, laparoscopy and vascular-access procedures.

"Some of the technologies used in gaming have found their way to improving medical simulation," says Dean Chang, chief technology officer and vice president of technology adoption and gaming business for Immersion ([www.immersion.com](http://www.immersion.com)). "The need is pretty clear."

With so much potential for the video game sector, Solomon and others say it makes sense for Maryland to pursue gaming as an industry to market.

"It's the fastest-growing technology business and the fastest-growing entertainment business," she says. "It's the intersection of high-revenue businesses."

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