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Motion-capture innovation can aid Orlando's video game, defense companies

Developer of wireless motion- capture system expands to Orlando in search of military work

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A fast-growing New York computer-simulation company with big players such as Sony and Intel among its partners has chosen Orlando as the site of its first expansion.

Organic Motion Inc. plans to open a business-development and sales office in Central Florida this summer, with consulting, engineering and support operations to follow later, Chief Executive Officer Andrew Tschesnok said during a Wednesday interview.

The Manhattan high-tech company, a developer of advanced computer-vision systems, was drawn to Central Florida by the potential for business opportunities within the region's defense-training, entertainment and medical simulation industries, he said.

Organic Motion began looking at Orlando after attending the simulation-training industry's annual trade show here in December, Tschesnok said. More than 500 companies and 12,000 people attended the event.

"We realized the opportunities for us here were going to be huge," he said. "It became clear that this is essentially the world headquarters for virtual simulation technology, and we had to be here."

Company officials were in Orlando this week scouting potential locations, demonstrating their "motion-capture" technology, and meeting with representatives of the local industry, government agencies and the University of Central Florida.

The company has been recognized within the industry for creating the world's first wireless motion-capture system for video-game development. It received *Popular Mechanics'* 2008 Breakthrough Award. Sony is showcasing it at its Sony Technology Wonder Lab Museum in New York. Intel has signed on as a partner to provide its high-speed image processor.

Conventional motion-capture systems have been used for years by game developers such as Electronic Arts' EA Tiburon unit in Maitland, which use them to record pro athletes and others in action for high-fidelity video games. But they require cumbersome bodysuits with sensors that can be expensive and time-consuming to use.

Organic Motion's system eliminates the need for the sensors and bodysuits. Experts say that slashes the costs and opens the way to a whole new generation of computer simulations — not just for video games, but for military training, education and a variety of other applications.

"It is not only ground-breaking but, I'd say, revolutionary," said James Oliverio, director of the University of Florida's Digital Worlds Institute, which uses the system to develop therapies for war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders. "It's not some futuristic system. It works now. And this is the company that got there first."

Local industry officials say attracting Organic Motion is a major coup for Orlando. "They provide a technology that bridges a wide range of applications and that is a key aspect of our strategy to diversify this region's simulation-business base, so we're not so dependent on defense dollars," said Russ Hauck, executive director of the National Center for Simulation, a trade group in Central Florida Research Park, near UCF.

Organic Motion, in turn, is looking to diversify its business by expanding to Orlando, company officials said. Until recently, its focus has largely been on developing commercial markets — for example, providing systems for sporting-goods stores that allow customers to experience the use of golf clubs and other gear in a realistic but "virtual" environment.

"We had a big rollout planned in that market, but the bad economy had almost put a hold on that," said Tschesnok, the company CEO. "So we started looking seriously at other large markets for our technology. That's when we began to focus on the military side, and we expect Orlando to be a real hot spot for that."

"I think they realize that for the kind of product they're building, this is going to be a key place to be," said Randall Shumaker, executive director of UCF's Institute for Simulation and Training. "Microsoft has proposed a similar idea for motion-capture systems, but they've offered no details. This company's system obviously already works, and they're ahead of the game."

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