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Digital Domain well on its way to hiring 500 in Port St. Lucie, CEO says

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Monday, April 11, 2011

[PORT ST. LUCIE](#) — [Digital Domain Media Group, formerly Digital Domain Holdings](#), has added more than 243 employees to its payroll, putting it ahead of schedule to hire a mandated 500 by 2014.

During Monday's City Council meeting, Digital Domain Media Group CEO John Textor gave an update on the company's progress since it launched its business here in 2009.

The company has an agreement to create 500 jobs with an average annual salary of \$65,000 in exchange for getting nearly \$70 million worth of state and local incentives.

Digital Domain Media Group, the parent company of Academy Award-winning digital effects and animation company Digital Domain in Venice, Calif., is growing faster than anticipated, Textor said.

Digital Domain Media Group is a diverse holding of media companies headquartered in Port St. Lucie. It comprises three main businesses, including Digital Domain Productions, Tradition Studios and the Digital Domain Institute.

Digital Domain projected hiring 90 employees by the end of this year, but since the company acquired In-Three Inc. late last year, a company that converts traditional two-dimensional films into three-dimensional stereo imagery, its accelerated its hiring.

In-Three did 3D stereo work on Tim Burton's 2010 film Alice in Wonderland.

"We've expanded our business model because we've been really surprised by the quality of the talent here locally," Textor said.

The company has outgrown temporary space it leases in Tradition Station and has moved into the 65,000-square-foot former Liberty Medical building at 8881 S. U.S. 1. As part of a local incentive package, the city is building Digital Domain an approximate 115,000-square-foot, \$40 million studio in Tradition near Interstate 95. The company will pay for the building through a lease with the city. The studio, on 19 acres near the Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies, is scheduled to open in December.

Textor said 120 workers are on the construction site every day, and about 88 percent of the contracted companies are from the Treasure Coast.

The building on U.S. 1 provides space mostly for employees working on 3-D effects. Textor said once the new studio is finished, the company likely will continue to occupy the U.S. 1 facility, in which it's invested \$600,000.

"We expect to go considerably beyond our original plan," Textor said. "The 500-job count was for the animation studio. Now that we've acquired In-Three and brought that 3-D business to Florida any of the jobs in 3-D would be above and beyond the scope of our original projections."

Textor said he expects to hire more than 1,000 people for the Port St. Lucie operations. He said about 40 percent of the hires came from the Treasure Coast and 60 percent came from other Florida communities. He said a large majority of the company's 243 employees are between the ages of 21 and 30.

Digital Domain also occupies temporary space in the Kight Center for Emerging Technologies at Indian River State College and plans to build the Digital Domain Institute in West Palm Beach, a four-year program in advanced digital media supported by the College of Motion Picture Arts at Florida State University.

Textor said the company hired 34 people from Indian River State College compared with two from Full Sail University in Orlando.

The Port St. Lucie company created a 60-second promo that premiered at the New York Mets opening game April 9. The film will introduce players at Mets home games during the 2011 season and is the first in a series of short films the company plans to create for the Mets games.

Digital Domain in California has created visual effects for blockbusters such as Titanic and Transformers. The company is currently producing visual effects for Thor, X-Men First Class, Transformers: Dark of the Moon, Real Steel, and others.

Textor said the Port St. Lucie location is working on two summer blockbusters

"What's nice is every project we're working on in the Venice studio can now be moved in part to our studios in either Vancouver, San Francisco or now in Port St. Lucie," Textor said. "We're required to keep these projects confidential until they are released, but we're working on two summer blockbusters in Port St. Lucie as we speak. It's a real sort of Hollywood blockbuster work happening right here in Port St. Lucie."

Textor said the studio in Venice does work for films owned by other entities. The films produced in Port St. Lucie are original stories created by the studio and by key people Digital Domain hired out of the original Disney animation studio in Orlando.



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