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Games forum gives boost to Australian industry

By *James Pearce, ZDNet Australia*

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A diverse group of people are interested in seeing Australia become a leading player in the computer games industry, in the hopes of generating significant export dollars for the country.

The [Australian Workshop on Interactive Entertainment](#) was held at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) today in a bid to stimulate research into creative technology in Sydney and throughout Australia.

"It's attempting to stimulate academic research that in the future can contribute to the game industry in Sydney and Australia," Dr Will Uther, one of the organisers of the event, told *ZDNet Australia*. He said Melbourne and Queensland had a well-developed games industry, while Sydney did not. However, Sydney houses a good special effects industry because of the movies made here, and that would be a good fit for a budding computer games industry.

The workshop was organised by Dr Yusuf Pisan of UTS, [Alan Blair](#) from the University of New South Wales (UNSW), [Manolya Kavakli](#) from Macquarie University, [Dr Wayne Moore](#) from Charles Sturt University (CSU) and [Dr William Uther of National ICT Australia \(NICTA\)](#). It was funded by UTS, UNSW, NICTA and CSU.

The computer game industry last year generated more revenue than Hollywood ticket sales, and Australia is in a prime position to grab a large slice of that, according to Uther. "Australian games have great potential for export," he said. "US games don't tend to sell well in Europe, and European games don't sell well in the US, but Australian games do equally well in both markets."

The first session was a lecture by industry stalwart [Chris Crawford](#), who began designing games for Atari in 1979. He argued that in interactive games the visual graphics were not as important as the algorithms which drove the interaction between characters. He pointed to the fact that Shrek grossed more than 10 times the box office sales than Final Fantasy, despite the second movie having greater visual realism. The reason, according to Crawford, is that the characters in Shrek showed emotion, while the characters in Final Fantasy were "soulless".

"You don't want to be realistic," said Crawford. "You want to be expressive in the [areas in which] you want to achieve." He then quoted Aristotle's statement that character is demonstrated through actions or decisions. For that reason, when designing a game it is important to first work out what you want the characters to do before deciding what personality traits they will have.

"Define the verbs, then define the personality variables of the characters," said Crawford. He said you need an "absolute minimum of 500 verbs" for good storytelling, but interactive gaming wouldn't flower until characters could perform more than 5,000 verbs.

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