DigiPen studios offer opportunities for game developers

Videogame developers here will soon have another avenue for their games to reach the world, complete with the possibility of funding from the Singapore Government.

Japanese gaming giant Nintendo and digital media university DigiPen launched the DigiPen Game Studios (DGS) yesterday. They aim to discover and publish new video games from Singapore, initially for the Nintendo 3DS handheld, and possibly for other gaming systems later on.

Later this year, DGS will organise its first game conference and call for local developers to submit their game concepts. The proposals selected will be developed and sold to a global audience through the Nintendo e-shop.

Mr Jason Chu, chief operating officer of DigiPen International, said selected game developers will be mentored and assisted to develop their titles for the 3DS platform. He hopes to pick 10 Singapore games by next year. Nintendo will put its marketing muscle behind these titles.

DGS is supported by the Media Development Authority (MDA). Said its assistant chief executive, Ms Angeline Poh: “DGS will provide our aspiring game developers with new opportunities to realise their dreams of making great games.”

The Straits Times understands that the MDA may support selected games with funding.

Game developers here had mixed reactions to the news. Several were concerned about the “limited market” of the Nintendo 3DS, which they see as a niche product. More than 53 million 3DS sets have been sold since its launch in 2011. But more than 300 million new smartphones are sold every quarter.

Nintendo’s relationship with third-party game developers is not as strong as those of its rivals Xbox One and Sony PlayStation 4. Nintendo’s Wii U is typically missing from the list of supported consoles for many leading triple-A console games such as Destiny, Batman Arkham Knight and Diablo III.

Mr Ian Gregory, co-founder of local game developer The Witching Hour Studios, said: “It’s a pity the deal doesn’t let local studios make use of popular Nintendo characters such as Mario and Link from the Zelda series, which would really be a huge boost to the marketability of the new games.”

Another hurdle is that most game developers here have not made games for the 3DS which has its own proprietary computer coding language. Developers used to coding for iOS, Android and PC can use Unity software to port their games to the 3DS platform. But Unity works only on the newer 3DS XL machines and not on all 3DS sets.

Mr Jeffrey Chee, founder of Happy Labs Studios, gave the new partnership the thumbs up.

He said: “By going into publishing, DigiPen can help its students get jobs when they graduate. For local game studios, it could be a source of affordable talent. The only issue is to figure out how much each party gets on the sale of the games.”

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