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#### ■Q&A: Virtual Heroes' Heneghan Takes Unreal Engine 3 'Seriously'

Serious games are becoming a serious business, with more companies than ever throwing their hats into the emerging market aimed at developing games designed to educate, train, and even empower their players. One of the companies at the forefront of this movement is NC-based developer Virtual Heroes, which specializes in creating learning solutions for federal systems, digital health and corporate training.



Last week [the company announced](#) that it had licensed Epic's popular middleware solution Unreal Engine 3 for development of serious games and/or advanced learning technologies, integrating the tech into its own Advanced Learning Technology platform for simulation learning and serious games based learning. Recently Gamasutra spoke with Jerry Heneghan, Virtual Heroes founder and CEO, to get a deeper understanding of what this move means for the company, as well as the larger serious games industry.

#### **First, why was Unreal Engine chosen by Virtual Heroes over other, perhaps most cost effective solutions?**

Our team has worked extensively on the *America's Army* game project. Because of this experience, we have seen the power of Unreal technology as it is used in the serious games space for strategic messaging and training and education applications. Many of our clients are asking for UE3 technology by name. This made our decision easy.

#### **Do you see embracing mainstream gaming technologies as particularly important to the continued growth of the emerging serious games market?**

Absolutely! By leveraging COTS (commercial-off-the-shelf) technologies, we can focus on challenges specific to serious games. These include the creation of instructor authoring tools, after-action-review technologies, the integration of biometrics and human physiology engines and SCORM compliance etc.

#### **In our talks with other companies developing serious games, many have stressed**

**that a balance must be struck between the serious goals of a given project and the need to also entertain the player. Is this decision to look to UE3, a technology used by many mainstream games on the market, a move to hopefully make serious games more fun to play?**

While working on *America's Army*, we learned that in order to be successful, we needed to be very careful not neglect the fun factor in any project. The position of our company is that we want to spearhead innovation in the serious games space by offering "best-in-class" commercial technologies from interactive entertainment, along with custom toolsets.

We feel that our arrangement with Epic provides us with a competitive advantage in the serious games market. This approach will enable us to create premium immersive experiences which provide the means to train and educate while measuring task related skills-proficiency along the way.

**Recently the engine has come under scrutiny over its complexity and alleged support issues. Does this concern your company in developing future serious games and other learning products?**

Not at all. We've been part of the Unreal Developer network since January 2004 when we began developing for the *America's Army* game project. We chose UE3 in large part because of helpful support available from UDN.

**Can you give us some examples of the types of products that Virtual Heroes will look to develop using this technology?**

We will use UE3 for our Advanced Learning Technology (A.L.T.) platform. We are currently developing *HumanSim* for medical education and training. We are also developing Virtual Astronaut for STEM education and SIMWARS for Federal Systems training. We will be building applications to "open standards" established by the DoD like DIS/HLA, SCORM, OneSaf etc.

**How with UE3 be integrated into the Advanced learning Platform? How will this platform be bettered through this middleware?**

UE3 will enable us to accelerate the creation of the A.L.T. platform and focus on the mission-critical challenges for serious games related to instructor authoring, after-action-reviews, linkages to learning management systems, AI, SCORM.

**Finally, given the visual fidelity afforded by the UE3 technology, is Virtual Heroes hoping to create more realistic games and experiences on the back of this partnership?**

Absolutely - that is the idea! Our goal is to create the most realistic, engaging and immersive training and education experiences, (based on real science) available

anywhere. In order to create suspension of disbelief, we are pursuing photo-realistic environments and Dynamic Virtual Humans Technology.

*POSTED: 08.50AM PST, 08/08/07 - Jason Dobson*