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## **Asian game firms urged to ride 'machinima' wave**

**By ONG BOON KIAT**

ASIAN game developers are urged to embrace a budding cinematic movement known as machinima.

Developers that do so - by giving away software tools to help those who want to create such movies - will end up selling more games, said machinima pioneer Hugh Hancock, who first coined the term machinima eight years ago.

Machinima (a contraction of 'machine cinema') refers to the use of scripted videogame scenes to make animated movies, instead of going the typical and expensive route of commercial rendering and animation software. A machinima film can be made by having players of online games play virtual actors. It can also tap software published by game developers - those that allow the manipulation of elements in their games.

While it is unlikely a machinima movie can reach the mega sales of a big budget production like Finding Nemo anytime soon, this movement could be on the verge of a mainstream breakthrough, said Mr Hancock.

The 31-year-old Scottish native was in Singapore recently to speak at the inaugural Singapore Digital Media Festival, a conference organised by the Singapore infocomm Technology Federation (SiTF). In an interview with BizIT at the event's sidelines, he noted that game developers are still uneasy when it comes to giving away software to machinima buffs, for fear of eroding their intellectual property and harming profits.

But the reverse could actually happen, he said. With this movement picking up steam now, game firms can reap publicity rewards from having their games associated with it. They can also reach a larger pool of audience via viral marketing.

He urged Asian game developers, traditionally strong in developing 3D game play and animation, to take the first step. 'You are talking about an incredible public relations opportunity for game companies,' he said.

As evidence of machinima's rising appeal, he cited a fantasy film series he produced entitled BloodSpell. Released in 2006, this series has been remastered into a feature film and released as a DVD image on the Internet. Mr Hancock said BloodSpell is now drawing strong interest from mainstream movie distributors.

Perhaps the most notable machinima film so far seen by mainstream audiences is an episode of the US animated comedy TV series South Park, entitled Make Love, Not Warcraft. This episode used extensive machinima sequences to parody the popular multiplayer online role-playing game World of Warcraft. It won an Emmy Award last year.

Interestingly, South Park's producers received help from World of Warcraft creator Blizzard

Entertainment during the shoot, and elements of that episode were actually incorporated in the game later.

But even as Mr Hancock urged Asian game firms to embrace machinima, he noted that this movement is still virtually non-existent in Asia. 'I'm not sure why, maybe it is because there is not a strong game-modding culture in Asia, or it could be because the industry here tends to be more bottom line driven.'

But Mr Hancock, who recently co-wrote the book *Machinima for Dummies*, remains positive. He said that Singapore, in particular, can become a hotbed for developments such as machinima, given the 'awesome' government support here for digital media development.

'I wish we had the same kind of support in UK when I started Strange Company,' he said, referring to the machinima movie production house he founded in 1997.

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### **Machinima action**

The five most frequently watched machinima clips on [www.machinima.com](http://www.machinima.com), one of the most popular machinima websites, are:

1. Red vs Blue (Episode 1)
2. Phil - Day Seven
3. Meet the Cow
4. Walter about marriage
5. Retaliation (Episode 2)

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