

## Ontario delegates head to Lyon France this week to lure games developers to province

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Representatives of the **Ontario Technology Corridor** (OTC) are off to Lyon France this week in hopes of convincing at least two or three digital media companies to consider setting up shop in Ontario. But judging by comments from one of the delegates, the group is facing stiff competition from within and outside of Canada.

“The only reason a company expands is if they can see making more money, reducing their risks, or reducing costs,” says Gerry Piszczowski, OTC spokesman and VP, business development at the **Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance**. He adds that it’s up to him and the OTC delegation to make the connection between those desires and Ontario for the companies they’re meeting at the **Game Connection Lyon** conference.

The OTC isn’t going to the conference solo. The group is partnering with the Canadian Embassy in France, the federal government, and the Ontario Investment and Trade Centre – a division of Ontario Exports in the provincial **Ministry of Economic Development and Trade**. The OTC will also be competing against industry organizations from B.C. and Quebec who are also attending the conference.

“They’re competitors,” he says. “This is investment attraction, not intergovernmental relations.”

Ontario has been making more noise lately in the games development space, trying to attract attention to its numerous education centres, talent pool, and government support systems for animation and other digital media industries. At the same time, other parts of Canada, including B.C., Quebec and New Brunswick, are ramping up their interactive entertainment PR machines.

In Lyon, the OTC has scheduled meetings with 12 companies, all of them in the small- to mid-sized enterprise (SME) category – fewer than 500 employees. The OTC generally aims to transform 20-25% of these leads into genuine prospects that might research Ontario further as a potential expansion spot. “Our objective is to get a couple of the companies to be interested enough to at least come over and do their due diligence.”

In addition to the other Canadian delegations, the OTC has to contend with groups from other countries and regions. Piszczowski says Game Connection

generally attracts companies from everywhere. But getting their attention doesn't come down to pointing out the shortcomings of other jurisdictions. "I never believe in gaining points on other people's backs," Pisarzowski says. The OTC prefers to distinguish itself by demonstrating a solid understanding of the digital media market, its challenges, and how companies can mitigate them by expanding in Ontario.

Larry MacKinnon, director of business development, technology for the **London Economic Development Corp.**, is also going to Lyon with the OTC. For him, it's a chance to showcase London's momentum in the games development industry over the last few years. The municipality has a couple of prominent games companies: **Big Blue Bubble Inc.**, **Digital Extremes**, and **Antic Entertainment Inc.**, which won the Best Innovative web-based Game for "Junk Battles" at this year's **Canadian New Media Awards**.

It's still a challenge to convince companies that London – not generally known as a hotbed of high tech innovation – is on its way up. "Two to three years ago, it was even harder to get people to believe it," MacKinnon says. But the city tries to support its companies with public relations and events. And even though he's sure other cities are courting Big Blue et al., "I can say we haven't lost a company to another jurisdiction."

Pisarzowski says the OTC often attends specific conferences, including Game Connection and the **Games Developer Conference** in San Francisco. It's useful for starting conversations with mid-sized businesses. "We're probably working on four to five opportunities that have come through this process."

It's somewhat different for the larger companies, like **Ubisoft**, the France-based developer that's planning to open a Toronto studio next year. It's better to connect with the big firms outside of the conferences, Pisarzowski says.

But all in all, the OTC has high hopes for Lyon. According to Pisarzowski, it's usually worth the trip. "This works. I wouldn't do it if it didn't."

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