

# Why SpaceX And Other Non-Gaming Companies Scout Talent At Video Game Conventions

A curious site greeted attendees at last year's [Electronic Entertainment Expo \(E3\)](#): a slightly charred SpaceX Dragon capsule next to a tent outside the Los Angeles Convention Center, with company staff giving away free "Occupy Mars" T-shirts. What's a real-life space firm doing at a convention dedicated to simulation?

"We're recruiting!" explained one of employees.

"We actually hire a lot of our best software engineers out of the gaming industry," said [SpaceX CEO Elon Musk](#), when *Fast Company* posed this question during the [May 29 Dragon V2 unveiling](#). "In gaming there's a lot of smart engineering talent doing really complex things. [Compared to] a lot of the algorithms involved in massive multiplayer online games...a docking sequence [between spacecraft] is actually relatively straightforward. So I'd encourage people in the gaming industry to think about creating the next generation of spacecraft and rockets."

"We actually hire a lot of our best software engineers out of the gaming industry," said SpaceX CEO Elon Musk.

SpaceX is among a handful of non-gaming companies that are using E3, the annual video game conference that took place in Los Angeles this week, to scout for talent.

The increased adoption of gaming technology for other uses--corporate training, recruiting, marketing, biometric analysis--require developers with experience using those tools. But it also has to do with a skillset that combines conceptual and linear thinking, teamwork, and comfort with failure.

"You're seeing more companies and institutions using games and interactivity as ways to recruit, train, and inspire employees, now that school kids and folks entering the workforce have grown up with video games," says [Richard Taylor](#), senior vice president of communications and research for the Entertainment Software Association.

"The nature of gaming programming is such that you have to be accustomed to failing, recalibrating, and moving forward efficiently, quickly, and without drama."

...ing, collaborating, and moving forward efficiently, quickly, and without drama," he said. "There's a collaboration and adaptability required in both creating and playing games--especially massively multiplayer online games--requiring partnerships to accomplish tasks. These are appealing elements to employers."



Gamers in the Xbox section of the 2014 E3 *Susan Karlin*

## The Gamer Mindset

"The gaming community has grown up, so people who were often derided in the past as living in their parents' basement actually work for a living," adds Amy Barzdukas, vice president of product management for premium products and new initiatives at [Hewlett-Packard](#). "And the overlap of gamers and developers is very high. If I were looking for developers--which I don't in my job--it certainly would be smart place to start. Hard-core gamers are computer savvy, but when they're looking at code, they see the story."

Gaming mindsets also mesh with environments that don't involve coding or games. [App Annie](#), a San Francisco firm providing analytics, market data, and rankings for more than 4 million apps (gaming and other), has attended E3 since starting up in

2010, encountering potential employees through heavy networking at parties. “Gaming attracts great engineering talent. But analytics is cultural, so it pervades beyond engineering and into product management,” says Marcos Sanchez, VP of global communications. “Gaming product managers have an analytic mindset, and to some extent, that moves into marketing as well.”

Game developers have access to sophisticated research data, such as the number of minutes players spend or the levels in which they make the most micro-transactions. Understanding rich data sets, and linking that to customer usage patterns, is an enormously valuable skill. “When you throw a bunch of data at them, they don’t turn into deers in headlights,” says Sanchez. “They understand its implications and know how to use it in a creative and nimble manner.”

### **Scouting for Entrepreneurial Partners**

Seattle startup [Reflux Labs](#) was at E3 for this first time this year, trying to recruit talent interested in partnering on applications developed with Reflux’s flagship product, [Boogio](#). It’s a “smart shoe” kit that outfits footwear with sensors and electronics that gather, control, and transmit data to other devices. It has applications in gaming, physical rehabilitation, athletic training, and control interface. Reflux Labs is selling its \$2,000 professional alpha development kits at E3, which will be followed by a \$300 hobbyist versions of the kit later this summer. The hope is that game developers will create new apps from the Boogio platform, which they can partner with Reflux to market. A consumer product is due next year.

“We’re scouting for employees to bring into the company, as well as freelance developers to create new applications for Boogio, then partner with us through our business ecosystem and distribution infrastructure, much the way Apple does with its App Store for iOS developers,” says Reflux founder and CEO Jose Torres. “These

artists and engineers have great technical abilities, can develop software with complex programming, and have a great understanding of user experience and interaction. But they also want to be entrepreneurs. We've identified so many possibilities [for developable apps] and don't have the resources to do it all. This way, we'll get good ideas from people who approach it as a creative tool, and empower them to be entrepreneurs."

John Underkoffler, who is best known for creating the technical blueprint inspiring the iconic gestural computer that [Tom Cruise used in \*Minority Report\*](#), is eyeing E3 for recruiting in the future. He's developed a [real-life version of his computer interface](#), the G-Speak, through his Los Angeles company, [Oblong](#). Now he wants to expand the interface capabilities.

"As a company whose mission is to change the world through radical new user interfaces, we pay close attention to graphics, visual design, and interaction," he adds. "There's no industry where those elements come together so adroitly as the gaming industry. A game designer-developer's skill set and mode of thinking are perfectly suited to how we work. They understand product deadlines, but also can't really cut visual corners, so they're accustomed to delivering beautiful work on time."