



Grand Theft Auto has shipped more than 270 million units worth over \$9 billion. Image: Rockstar Games

ROCKSTAR DEAL CONFIRMS SCOTLAND IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO PLAY

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Scotland's reputation as one of the world's top locations for games development was further underlined this week when New York-based [Rockstar Games](#) – owners of the best-selling *Grand Theft Auto* franchise – [confirmed it had acquired](#) Dundee developer [Ruffian Games](#).

“We are thrilled to have Ruffian join the Rockstar Games family,” said Sam Houser, founder of Rockstar Games. “The Ruffian team are a talented addition to Rockstar’s global studios, and we look forward to working together on future projects.”

Rockstar said Ruffian’s talented team of just over 40 had a “depth of development experience.” The company had partnered with [Microsoft](#) to work on the *Crackdown* series, and with [343 Industries](#) on *Halo: Reach* from the *Halo Master Chief Collection*, among many other projects.

Ruffian, which was founded in 2008 by Gary Liddon and Billy Thomson, also worked on some early Rockstar titles from the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Manhunt* series. “We are

incredibly excited to be joining the Rockstar team,” Thompson said of the deal.

“Not only do we have the opportunity to work on some of the most successful entertainment properties in the world, but Rockstar’s investment in our studio is a great sign for the continued expansion of game development here in Scotland.”

Blockbuster legacy

This deal builds on a legacy of gaming expertise in Scotland. *Grand Theft Auto* has shipped more than 270 million units worth over \$9 billion, making it one of the one of the most successful entertainment properties of all time. The franchise was created in Scotland in 1997 by Dundee games studio DMA Design, which was acquired by Rockstar’s parent company, [Take-Two Interactive](#), in 2000 and now operates out of Edinburgh as Rockstar North.

The team behind DMA launched a host of other smash hits from Scotland, including *Lemmings*, one of the best-selling video games of the early 1990s, and *Crackdown*, a BAFTA award-winning action adventure game that was one of the top-selling games of 2007.

More recently, the console version of *Minecraft* – the best-selling video game of all time – has been developed in Scotland by Dundee-based games developer [4J Studios](#).

I enjoyed listening to Chris van der Kuyl, chairman and co-founder of 4J Studios, explaining some of the background during a Scottish Development International webinar two weeks ago on opportunities in Scotland’s gaming sector ([recording here](#)).

“We partnered with the team at [Mojang Studios](#) (the Swedish developer of Minecraft) almost 10 years ago now to take on the console development duties for Minecraft,” van der Kuyl explained. “And from that day to this, we have developed and put into the market seven versions of Minecraft which have sold over 60 million copies. So a big chunk of the revenue of the most successful, single game franchise in the world was developed here in Scotland.”

 Minecraft is the best-selling video game of all time.

Image: Mojang / 4J Studios

Minecraft is the best-selling video game of all time. Image: Mojang / 4J Studios

A magnet for talent

As games studios of scale developed in Scotland in the mid-1990s, the need to attract world-class talent became a priority and in 1997, [Abertay University](#) in Dundee launched the world's first computer games degrees.

Abertay is also now home to the UK's first ever [Centre for Excellence in Computer Games Education](#) and leads [InGAME](#), an £11.5 million research and development centre created to drive process, technology and product innovation across games and media. Earlier this week InGAME [announced two further R&D collaborations](#) aimed at increasing the scale and value of the Dundee videogames cluster.

Innovations like these have helped Scotland build one of the largest centres of games development in the UK, employing more than 1,500 developers and another 3,000 people indirectly. Sixteen universities across Scotland now offer more than 175 computer science and gaming-related courses, five of which are from global top 200 institutions.

Technology expertise

More than 96,000 people work in digital technology roles in Scotland and around 21,000 students graduate from universities each year in IT, engineering, maths and sciences.

“We've got amazing technical depth,” van der Kuyl at 4J Studios said of Scotland’s skills base. “Combined with incredible creative talent, both visually, orally and in storytelling – all the components that come around games. There are not many places in the world where you find that kind of culture. But Scotland has it.”

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Chris van der Kuyl, Chairman, 4J Studios

Scotland’s deep expertise in technologies including data, artificial intelligence, speech graphics and immersive content including virtual and augmented reality is a also huge bonus for games studios.

At Glasgow School of Art, for example, the [School of Simulation and Visualisation](#) has a large portfolio of projects centred on expertise in real-time 3D visualisation, 3D sound, modelling, motion capture and animation.

World-class games cluster

This world-class talent base has helped Scotland grow an internationally-renowned games cluster that includes [Rockstar North](#), [Axis Studios](#), [Epic Games](#), [4J Studios](#), [ChilliConnect](#), [deltaDNA](#), [Krotos](#), [Cobra Mobile](#), [No Code](#) and [YoYo Games](#).

Based in North Carolina, Epic Games has more than 40 offices worldwide and operates [Fortnite](#), one of the world's largest games, with over 350 million accounts and 2.5 billion friend connections. Epic also develops the real-time 3D creation tool, [Unreal Engine](#), which is used by industries including film and television to create immersive 3D content.

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Fortnite from Epic Games has more than 350 million accounts and 2.5 billion friend connections. Image: Epic Games

Epic came to Scotland in 2018 through the acquisition of Cloudgine, the creators of a cloud-based games development tool co-founded in Edinburgh by Dave Jones – the video game developer behind *Grand Theft Auto* – and his Italian co-founders Maurizio Sciglio (who was chief executive) and Marco Anastasi (chief technology officer).

Maurizio Sciglio is now Epic's studio director in Scotland and also spoke at our Scottish Development International gaming webinar. He explained some of his motivation for choosing to live and work in Scotland – and then build his business here.

“I decided to move to Scotland from Italy because I knew that's where *Grand Theft Auto* and *Lemmings* were created,” he said.

“That legacy, which now includes Minecraft, has allowed developers to attract talent and Scotland to build a great reputation for games. This in turn has led to critical mass and the creation of an entire games ecosystem.”

Supportive environment

Scotland's quality of life and its strong community of tech entrepreneurs were also big attractions.

“Starting a company can be very difficult,” Sciglio says. “So having a network of founders close to you is really important. And in Scotland you have lots of founders, especially in technology.”

Here to help

My own role at Scottish Development International involves working with software and IT businesses, including games studios, looking to invest or develop operations in Scotland.

We can help you identify understand the benefits of investing in Scotland, explore funding options, find premises and connect with potential partners. We can also support with market intelligence and competitive insights.

You can find out more about Scotland’s games sector in our downloadable guide, [here](#).

Meantime, if you’d like to chat about specific support, please contact me direct through LinkedIn. I look forward to speaking with you!

Published By



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Hatton

Earlier this week New York HQ'd Rockstar Games acquired Dundee developer Ruffian Games. I've taken a look at the Gaming sector in Scotland and why it attracts so much attention from international companies and investors.

17 comments



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Matthias Klaes

Digital Finance | Governance | Policy Advice

6mo

Very useful overview

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Mark Lloyd

Porting - Production and Co-Development at Devolver Digital

7mo

Absolutely right, some amazing talent here on Scotland.

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LinkedIn User

7mo

It's so exciting to see Scotland at the forefront of such a globally important entertainment sector. We definitely punch above our weight in a global business context.

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Alistair McKay
SQA Business Development Manager

7mo

Great article Graham, hope you are well.

Like Reply | 1 Like



George Corner
Senior Business Analyst at the Scottish Government

7mo

Vague memories of much scoffing when, I think it was, Abertay Uni in Dundee offered the country's first degree in game design some years ago now. I thought they were fast out the traps at the time and ahead of the, ahem, game.

Like Reply | 1 Like



Ashley Otu
Editorial Board at The Computer Games Journal

7mo

Truly a very insightful and engaging article about the state of the Scottish Video Game Industry! Thank you for this, I am planning to do a research project about the industry ! :)
Nice to meet you and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day! Best Regards!

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