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## Disney to buy Chicago-based video game studio Wideload Games

### Wideload Games leader Alexander Seropian will head creative for Disney video units

By Ben Fritz

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The Walt Disney Co. is continuing to bring in creative talent from the outside, hiring the co-founder of the company behind the hit video game series "Halo" as the new head of creative for its video game division.

Along with tapping Alexander Seropian, Disney is also buying the game development studio he runs, Chicago-based Wideload Games Inc.

"At Wideload, we've conscientiously built a forward-looking approach to game development that borrows many techniques from the film industry," Seropian said in a statement. "Now, Wideload will be a part of one of the largest, most respected entertainment companies in the world."

The deal, announced Tuesday, comes just a week after Disney bought Marvel Entertainment Inc. for \$4 billion. Financial terms of the Wideload agreement were not disclosed, but the deal further illustrates how the media conglomerate is making strategic purchases to expand its creative capabilities.

Seropian co-founded his first video game company, Bungie Software, in 1991 while he was a student at the University of Chicago. He helped create the first-person shooter game "Halo" and sold Bungie to Microsoft in 2000. Seropian then started Wideload in 2003 with other former Bungie employees.

Wideload, which has 25 full-time employees, will remain in Chicago under the leadership of its president, Tom Kang. Disney said the Chicago studio is working on an original family console game that will be launched next year.

In his new role of vice president of creative at Disney Interactive Studios, Seropian will coordinate production at all of Disney's eight internally owned video game development studios.

"Currently our creative team doesn't have central leadership," said Graham Hopper, general manager for Disney Interactive. "He'll be working with our studios to make their work better outside of the normal review process. There are a whole suite of things we want Alex to do for us."

Disney has acquired several game development studios in the last few years, including one run by industry veteran Warren Spector. Some are producing games based on the company's movie and TV properties, while others are creating original characters and worlds.

Although Bungie is a well-respected development studio in the video game industry, Wideload has a much weaker track record. Its last game, a 2008 release titled "Hail to the Chimp," was poorly received critically and commercially.



Hopper, however, said he's pleased with the new game Wideload is doing for Disney and that he's confident the developer can prosper with the right "publishing muscle."

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