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DreamWorks Partners with Intel, Leaves AMD Behind

According to officials from the studio, Intel's future chips and technology promise more power

DreamWorks Animation SKG has decided to choose Intel as its supplier for chips and other technology related products the company uses for computer-animation operations, deserting its former supplier, AMD. Following the deal, the studio's computing hardware, which includes 1,500 HP server systems, and 1,000 workstations, all based on AMD microprocessors, will be replaced by new HP Intel-based systems. Advanced Micro Devices has been around tech-savvy animation houses for a long time, and had a three-year partnership with DreamWorks signed in April 2005, says The Wall Street Journal. Last year, AMD launched Barcelona, a processor meant to be a big player in the movie industry, yet a bug and a few delays were a step backwards for the product."AMD maintained a long and fruitful relationship with DreamWorks Animation, beginning in early 2005. Earlier this year, AMD and DreamWorks decided not to extend our marketing and technology relationship. However, DreamWorks Animation is still an important and respected AMD customer and we look forward to having the opportunity to work with them again in the future," AMD said in a statement. According to DreamWorks Animation, the capabilities announced for two of the upcoming Intel chips, namely Nehalem and Larrabee, which promise faster computing operations, helping this way the studio to make the shift to 3-D animations next year. "When we look at the Intel roadmap, it is more closely aligned with our needs," John Batter, president of production at DreamWorks Animations, said during a conversation with Nanotech: The Circuits blog. "The rendering times have been going up because of the complexity and richness of the images. Then you layer on top of that 3D. Something that's already growing and doubling it."The best technology is coming from Intel, Batter added. "You need a lot more horsepower. On Intel's upcoming generation, the number of cores is going to help us satiate the big spike in our needs." He also confirmed the three-year partnership with AMD. "Our objective is to significantly heighten the movie going experience using DreamWorks Animation's ground-breaking 3-D filmmaking tools," said Jeffrey Katzenberg, CEO of DreamWorks Animation. "Technology plays a significant role in enabling our artists to tell great stories. By utilizing Intel's industry-leading computing products, we will create a new and innovative way for moviegoers to experience our films in 3-D."Intel and DreamWorks announced their 3D filmmaking technology alliance on Tuesday. Starting with the next year, the studio plans to use stereoscopic 3D for its featured films; this means that the viewer has to use special glasses for enhanced 3D. According to Intel, the company will provide DreamWorks with "the latest high-performance processing technologies, including future chips with multiple processing cores".Batter also stated that Intel is helping DreamWorks in the process of redesigning its animation tools. "Our animation tools are all proprietary here. Intel is rearchitecting our software tools (...) to take advantage of multicore and make our renderer highly scalable as well as making our character animation tools highly scalable." According to Batter, the studio uses around 5,000 cores on rendering farms to create animations. The increasing number of cores asks for its tools to be adapted. At the moment, Intel comes with four cores per chip, but the forthcoming Nehalem features eight, while Larrabee is expected to bring 32.