ADELAIDE game developer Ratbag is seeking to hire at least 16 new programmers in the next three months after securing contracts worth $11 million.

The company said the additional programmers were needed to service two large contracts, including a deal to build a game based on the 70’s television hit, The Dukes of Hazzard.

Ratbag business development manager Mark Bracken said the company was on a talent quest, needed 10 programmers to start immediately and at least six more within three months. The 16 additional staff would bring the total Ratbag workforce to 80.

In addition to the Dukes title, Mr Bracken said Ratbag had been awarded a $9 million contract to build a big-budget action title for Activision – Ratbag’s first "Triple A" title, as the more complex and sophisticated games are called.

Details of the Activision contract have not been released. It is understood that much of the work of the developers initially will be in extending core Ratbag technology used in its games engine.

The title of the Activision game has not been made public, and the product is not expected to reach consumers until the second half of 2005.

Mr Bracken said the company had had some difficulty in finding local programming talent to fill the positions. Such roles were highly specialised, and the burgeoning games market had soaked up a big portion of the available talent pool.
Chief executive and co-founder Greg Siegele said the company had received growing numbers of applications from overseas programmers – but that its preference was to hire locally.

"We’re in this bizarre position of having 15 overseas – mostly UK – people applying for work to every one Australian (application)," Mr Siegele said.

"While it’s good to have this international recognition – and we welcome people from overseas – the process of hiring people internationally is slow and costly," he said.

The Dukes of Hazzard title had been commissioned by global game developer UbiSoft, and would include most of the series’ original actors, including Catherine Bach and John Scheider. It is in its final stages of development and expected to be released in August.

Ratbag is looking for programmers proficient in C/C++, or with some low-level embedded software experience. A degree in computer science, computer systems engineering, maths or physics would be desirable, the company said.