Journey of digital animator Daniel Hernandez from Mexico to Spider-Man

After graduating from the first generation of **Digital Art and Animation** at **Tec de Monterrey's State of Mexico campus**, Daniel Hernandez heard about an opportunity to present his portfolio to a recruiter from **Sony Pictures Imageworks.**

Although Daniel scheduled **two appointments with the recruiter** and waited for several hours, she did not show up for the appointments. On the second occasion, Daniel was notified that the Sony employee would not be returning.

Daniel, now an animator at **Walt Disney Animation Studios**, tells **CONECTA** how he used **patience and persistence** to enter the **most important animation industry in the world**, where he even worked on an **Oscar-winning film**.

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, *Hotel Transylvania 4*, *The Sea Monster*, *The Mitchells vs. the Machines*, *Angry Birds 2*; and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, are some of the productions in which **he has brought characters to life** as a **3D animator**.

Disappointed at not having been able to present his work, Daniel left Mexico City for his parents' home 90 kilometers away in Pachuca where, upon arrival, he received **a call that would change the course of his career**.

/> width="900" loading="lazy">   **Earning an opportunity to meet a recruiter**

One day, the Tec graduate from the State of Mexico came across a post on Facebook about **Creativa Fest**, an event with **competitions** to showcase talent which would also be attended by **recruiters from international production companies**.

As a fan of the **Hotel Transylvania** movies, he took the **unique opportunity** to present his work to the recruiter.

His experience up to that point had been nothing more than his own startup, which had not been successful, and he had also worked for a Mexican production company on a film that **never made it to the big screen.**

*"I didn't have a good reel (portfolio), but **I had been practicing on my own** doing exercises. At the festival, **I won the best animation reel** and so I earned the opportunity to meet a **Sony recruiter,"** he said.*

"I took advantage of Tec's facilities, its equipment, and the library [...] staying even on weekends practicing animation exercises to improve myself."

The call that brought his dream back to life

Upon arriving at his parents' home, he received a call from one of the organizers to let him know about **one last unexpected opportunity.**

*"The recruiter's back! There's going to be a VIP meeting and we're going to keep a ticket for you to **present your reel**,"* Daniel recalls the message he received.

Without hesitation, he returned to Mexico City as soon as possible to get to the interview site.

"I just arrived (at my parents' house), said hello, and went back to Mexico City," he said with a laugh as he recalled that story.

*"Running and pouring with sweat, I arrived at the closing party and finally saw the recruiter and introduced myself. I showed her **my reel with all the exercises.**"*

At the end of the party, Daniel was left waiting for the recruiter's **final decision**.

"That's when she told me, 'You've convinced me, but you still have to convince an animation supervisor from Hotel Transylvania,'" he recalls excitedly.

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"Daniel, we want to hire you"

As a child, Daniel was fascinated with a **puppet** that his parents had given him; he spent hours playing with it, **making it move** and pretending it was alive.

*"It was a puppet that my parents had bought me at a fair; I really enjoyed playing with it because I liked **imagining it was alive**. I would make little sketches and show them to my siblings and my parents."*

According to the artist, **3D animation** has certain characteristics similar to playing with that toy, such as giving movement, emotions, and personality to the characters.

That puppet was the precursor that led him to meet the Sony supervisor, who **asked him about his professional experience** since he only had practice exercises.

"He asked me if I'd worked on any films and I told him that I had, but the film had never made it to the big screen."

Then, the supervisor asked him to do **three animation exercises** in the style of Hotel Transylvania.

*"They were really long exercises. A lot of people would have given up, but it had taken me a long time to get that opportunity and I told myself, **'This is my way in.'** I was able to finish two... I sent them off and the next day, the recruiter called me and told me, **'Daniel, we want to hire you. When can you start?'"***

After he hung up the phone, he was so excited and **shouted so loudly** that one of his neighbors came **knocking on his door** to see if he was okay.

That was one of the most important moments of his life, Daniel says.

"The next day, the recruiter called me and told me, 'Daniel, we want to hire you. When can you start?'"

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Developing as a digital artist at Sony

Daniel joined **Sony Pictures Imageworks** in 2017 and had to relocate to **Vancouver**, **Canada**. The first film he worked on was **Hotel Transylvania 3.**

"I was hired at an intermediate level; ***it took me 3 months to create 40 seconds of the film****. I was thrilled to work with the characters from Hotel Transylvania.*"

As that production was wrapping up, the production company began developing **Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse** and Daniel was one of the animators selected to be on the project, which went on to win the **Oscar for Best Animation.**

"I animated several main characters, but mostly Miles (the main character). I don't know how to describe what I felt when ***the film won the Oscar.*** *I never imagined it would happen; it was a great joy".*

"I don't know how to describe what I felt when the movie (Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse) won the Oscar. I never imagined it would happen; it was a great joy."

Following those first two productions, Daniel worked as an intermediate animator on seven more Sony films, including the **two Oscar-nominated films** *The Mitchells vs. the Machines* and *The Sea Monster*.

It was in the most recent film of the arachnid superhero, **Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse**, where the studio gave Daniel the opportunity to work as a **senior 3D animator**, which involved longer, **more technically challenging** scenes.

In the Spider-Man sequel, Daniel was able to bring characters such as **Miles Morales, Gwen Stacy, and villains such as The Vulture and The Blob to life.**

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Achieving every animator's dream: Going to Disney

As a child, Daniel would turn on the television in his room to spend his afternoons watching cartoons and **animated films** such as **Walt Disney's Mulan**, one of the films that got him interested in animation.

From that moment, he began to love the arts, drawing in his notebooks and creating his own stories. Later, **encouraged by his father, he studied animation at Tec de Monterrey**, and it was that same passion that took him to **Sony Pictures Imageworks**, where he excelled as a digital artist.

*"After each production, Sony awards only one person with an internal distinction. It's an award that's called the applause award, which **celebrates your performance** and recognizes that you gave more than what was expected. I **won two of those awards"**.*

For more than 5 years, the Tec graduate was one of Sony Pictures Imagework's talents, until one day he was invited by a **Walt Disney Animation Studios** recruiter to join their team.

*"Fate brought me to Sony, I was thrilled to be there, but I also thought I would like the Disney experience because **it's the dream of everyone who wants to study animation**, and what they offered me was something even cooler,"* he said.

The animator pointed out that the studio he now works for is part of a new Disney project, in which he will begin working on film-quality productions for its **streaming platform**.

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Animation: His passion and profession

Daniel recalls that it was a big challenge to be part of the **first graduating class of Digital Art and Animation** because of the challenge for the professors, who were professionals combining their experience with pedagogy.

However, he took advantage of the technologies and workshops available at the Tec.

*"No one there was an experienced professor. **I took great advantage of the Tec's facilities, its equipment, and the library**; I would go to other classes and would stay even on weekends practicing animation exercises to improve.*

Years after graduating, when Daniel was already a professional animator, he **returned to the Tec as a professor**, where for two years he was able to share his knowledge with students.

*"In the future, I would like to have **my own online character animation school**, especially for Mexican or Latin American audiences, and help develop the talent from our region,"* he concluded.

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