



Second Life The Virtual World, Web 2.0 Will They Have Significance for the Enterprise?

by Corey Palubiak, Gen Y Contributor

Intro by Randy Palubiak

WOW! Times are changing...sure! So are technologies and methodologies. Many recognize that the convergence of TVs and PCs is having a significant impact on communications and learning in the enterprise. Most of us are also finding that this impact is due in large part to the influence the media-based technologies are having on the workforce entering the marketplace – Generation Y....also referred to as millennials.

At Enliten, we are finding that the new, innovative technologies combined with the Gen Y mindset are creating a near endless challenge for our enterprise clients to address. At a time where media managers and information officers are faced with developing their business strategies to align with corporate goals, selecting and implementing the technology solutions to help them meet these goals, they are also faced with a changing workforce – Young individuals who do things different. They are multi-taskers that know how to use technology as they juggle the use of talking on cell phones while checking e-mails on their PDAs and surfing the Internet. In fact, they will embrace media-based technologies to do their jobs. Also, they will likely demand that media-based approaches be used to train them on how to do their jobs – when, where, and how they choose.

In a moment of brilliance (possibly), I approached one of my sons (Corey) with a challenge: Find out what the big deal is with Second Life. In a little more detail, his mission is to join the virtual world of Second Life, and through his avatar (virtual person) learn everything possible that can be of value to all of us in media communications.*

Following is Corey's initial report. It is about the challenges he encountered when first entering Second Life. Corey will continue to navigate through Second Life, providing us with future updates on his experiences and findings. The primary objective is for Corey, a qualified Gen Yer, to provide his findings, thoughts, and perspectives on Second Life and Web 2.0. Ideally, his series of articles will give us insight on how to address/handle those in the upcoming workforce – how to use the social aspects of Web 2.0 and media-based technologies to meet business objectives.

**If you are not familiar with Second Life, Google it. There, you will find a plethora of information about this virtual world that, along with other social-based sites such as Youtube, Myspace and Facebook, is defining the Web 2.0 craze. Then, go to www.secondlife.com to experience it yourself. Finally, and most important, visualize how Second Life and other social sites can be leveraged in the enterprise space to enhance or improve communications and the learning experience for your employees.*



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Corey Palubiak

I was asked to explore the virtual world of Second Life. And to be honest with you, I wasn't really sure what that meant at first. The word "virtual" kind of clued me in to the fact that it was going to be computer/internet related, but what in the heck was Web 2.0 or an avatar? So after a bit of quick research to bring me up to speed, I realized there was a lot to uncover in this three-dimensional virtual world. How did I miss this craze? As your typical Gen Yer, I have played more than my fair share of X-box games and internet poker tournaments, so I thought I was pretty much up to date on the latest computer and gaming trends.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Already inhabited by over 8 million "residents," this cyberspace phenomenon known as Second Life has grown tremendously since launching in 2003. Not only are new individual users signing up on a daily basis, but well known businesses and major corporations are joining in on the fun too. What better way to increase brand visibility and product awareness than through a virtual outlet that has roughly 1.5 million of its total users logging on within a two-month time span? So after learning all this, I decided that jumping on the Second Life bandwagon was something I could really delve into. Let me tell you about my experience.

In order to become a member of the Second Life community, I had to fill out basic information about myself on www.secondlife.com. After providing an email for verification purposes as well as other contact information, I began the process of creating an avatar, a graphical image to represent myself. I created a first name (Disdaman) and then chose from a long list of predetermined last names (Slade) to complete my character's name.



Disdaman Slade

Next, I browsed the choices of avatars: male or female, punk rocker to guy next door, etc. Most avatar characteristics can be modified once in the program; from the style of the clothes worn to the height and size of the character. Modifications and options appear to be endless and can be constantly changed at anytime.

Before completing the signup process, I was given the option to continue with a basic free account or to upgrade and pay for a premium account. With the free account, I have been able to participate in everything Second Life has to offer such as its tools,

events, and communities, with the exception of owning my own property and then building upon it. Overall, the sign up and verification process did not take long. Once done, I then had to download Second Life to my computer. Be advised of the system requirements: a Cable or DSL connection, Windows XP or Windows 2000 (a Windows Vista application is currently undergoing testing), and 32-bit resolution to run the program. Anyone still plugging away on an old computer screen or on dial-up might be out of luck.

Once the program had been downloaded and updated, I logged into Second Life and appeared on Help Island. Here, I had to complete a series of basic tasks and functions commonly used in Second Life before moving on. The four areas of concentration are Appearance, Communicate, Move, and Search. Once these tasks had been completed, which could be done in any order, I was able to use the map features to locate my avatar, other destinations as well as groups of interest such as basket weaving. Also, I learned how to get into and drive a vehicle and how to fly around like superman. These methods of movement allowed me to quickly navigate my avatar to the desired destination rather than just walking. Now that I had learned enough to successfully function as a member of the Second Life society, I was ready to leave Help Island. Overall, this training took about 45 minutes to complete.

I opted to move on from Help Island and was transferred to a “newbie” island. Here, I incorporated everything already learned, and picked up a few additional tips and tasks, while meeting other new individuals. Once comfortable, I moved into the real Second Life by finding the advertising billboard and clicking on it. Note to new users: once you leave this island there is no going back, so make sure to learn all that you can before moving on.

My first destination in the real Second Life community was a beach. There were roughly a half dozen people wandering around socializing while a contest for the best sculpture was taking place. Walking around this area, I found a couple dozen sculptures that were entered in the contest. I was able to vote on the one I liked the most but not enter my own creation. To do this, I would have to own a piece of land on which to create the sculpture. After voting and doing a bit more exploring, I decided it was time to move on and began to choose random locations to be transported for exploration.

Some other areas of note included a dance club, a few casinos, and an information center. The information center was a high traffic destination. Here you could earn the universal currency of Second Life known as Linden dollars by going to designated websites and completing several surveys on various real life products. If you have a premium account, you earn a weekly stipend of L\$300, but for those with a free account, there are other ways to earn money. For example, destinations wanting to attract and maintain avatars also reward Linden dollars for completing basic tasks. Money may be awarded to someone for simply sitting on a bench or a chair for a predetermined amount of time. Personally, I earned 2 Linden dollars for every 5 minutes I spent being a janitor. This was money easily earned considering the computer took over all the animated functions, while I sat back and watched.

I found it intriguing how realistic this 3D virtual world has actually become. From grocery stores and malls to restaurants and stadiums, anything I could basically want or need could be found in Second Life. Trashcans are abundantly available, as well as

advertising opportunities. In-world events mimicking real-life happenings such as a garage sale, fistfight, or party also take place. For instance, USA Today's Jane Clark documents the success and significance of the party thrown June 10, 2007 at the Mayan archaeological site Chichen-Itza by the Mexican Tourism Board. Thousands of guests attended. "Real-world tourism entities...are setting up virtual recreations there to heighten awareness of their real-world existence," Clark states. Basically, if users are interested in what they see through inexpensive exploration in Second Life, then they might actually consider traveling there. For this reason, other countries, hotels, and travel agencies have now opened an in-world location.

I found that other companies have incorporated the virtual world into their business plans. Companies like Sears and Circuit City have their own online showcases for consumers to try out items in their virtual homes, hoping that they will result in real-life purchases. And car manufacturers have been creating new models for trial on Second Life to determine design popularity and functionality while avoiding valuable dollars wasted on a real-life prototype. In addition, companies have used Second Life to hold and conduct training sessions and corporate meetings. Even a presidential candidate promoted his campaign last year by holding an in-world seminar. Many resident avatars have successfully founded their own businesses making part or all of their real-life living from them. I find that unbelievable!

Summary

Overall, my Second Life experience was pleasant, informative, and eye-opening. However, I did run into a few problems during my exploration of Second Life. On a few occasions, I lost control of my avatar. I would be in the process of walking or flying and would not be able to stop or change directions. My avatar would continue in the same direction at the same speed and would not respond to anything I tried. This would result in my having to close the entire program and rebooting it. Since Second Life is so large and continually processes so much information, I would run into very slow loading times. When I transported to new areas, it would take anywhere from 30 seconds up to 2 minutes for my surroundings to fully load. As a result, I was not able to read signs right away or know the area I was in. This process could indeed be tedious.

While Second Life offers a variety of opportunities and experiences, it is a vast community that can be overwhelming at times. There are so many places to go and so much to see that I could spend hours upon hours exploring and still barely scratch the surface. There are endless possibilities that I haven't even had the chance to explore. One of these days, I may venture to start my own in-world business, assuming that dad will continue to fund my research. If so, I look forward to sharing my findings and experiences with you.