Chapter 9
Applications of Second Life

Nicole Buzzetto-More
University of Maryland Eastern Shore, USA

ABSTRACT

Second Life is a massive three dimensional online virtual world with a complex and realistic digital landscape where individuals create and author avatars that interact with one another. Recognizing the potential of this virtual reality, the applications of Second Life are being examined by the business and educational communities. The following chapter will provide readers with a better understanding of Second Life; the applications and implications of Second Life for teaching, learning, and professional development training; project examples; best practices; a model for the development of education and/ or training projects in Second Life; pitfalls and potential problems; how Second Life can offer a linkage between education, professional development training, and organizational development; and future directions for Second Life.

INTRODUCTION

The current impact of technological innovation extends farther and deeper than at any other time in our history and these advances have altered the very constructs of space and time and have changed visibility, making it global in scope (Buzzetto-More, 2006). Social networking has become a phenomenon and online socialization and virtual worlds are posed to continue to play a major role in Web 2.0

(Buzzetto-More, 2007) whereas social networking is becoming increasingly more intertwined in the lives of people with many individuals in society considering them as important and meaningful as face to face interactions (Buzzetto-More, 2008). As a result, and whether you are a user, the impact of online social networking cannot be ignored.

Online social networking is engendering a redefinition of the term community as the social software movement promotes virtual spaces which emerge as zones for information-sharing, collaboration, exploration, and community formation and exten-

sion (Branch, 2006). They are altering the human fabric of the World Wide Web and are quickly becoming the digital equivalent of hanging out at the mall for the millennium generation (Bell, 2006). Suter, Alexandar, and Kaplan (2005, p.49) explored the various dimensions of social software as including: *"tools for augmenting human social and collaborative abilities; ...a medium for facilitating social connection and information interchange; and an ecology for enabling a system of people, practices, values and technologies in a particular local environment"*

Multi User Domains, better known as MUDs, have existed for well over a decade; however, this new generation of MUDs are complex three dimensional virtual worlds. They are a place for expression and imagination which still incorporate norms and practices that often mirror those of the material world (Crowe and Bradford, 2006). They have taken many shapes over the years and today have evolved into realistic and sophisticated realms often involving game play, the two largest being World of Warcraft© and Second Life.

World of Warcraft© is a type of MUD that is categorized as a <u>massively multiplayer online role-playing game</u> (MMORPG). All MMORPGs are skill based games that require players to control an avatar within a fantasy game-world that includes quests, interactions and/or fighting monsters. World of Warcraft© is a pay-based subscription service and as of October, 2008 World of Warcraft© had 11 million subscribers making it the world's largest MMORPG (Blizzard Entertainment, 2008).

Currently, the focus in the virtual reality arena is Second Life, an advanced online virtual world where individuals create and author avatars. It is being presented as a highly immersive medium that can serve as an authentic, self directed, personal, and flexible means for delivering online education and professional development training (Conklin, 2007). It differs from MMORPGs like World of Warcraft© because it is does not present a competitive gaming environment. As

a result, the usage of Second Life extends into business and educational pursuits. While many suggestions for the use of Second Life as a tool exist the question remains: Is Second Life merely a fad or is virtuality posed to have a permanent impact that changes the way we understand and define e-Learning and e-business?

WHAT IS SECOND LIFE?

Second Life is an expansive online world that first opened to the public in 2003. Growing exponentially, as of June 2008, it was inhabited by 14 million individuals from across the globe with approximately 500,000 resident logins a week and around 900,000 logins per month (Second Life Statistics, 2008). Second Life is privately-owned, partly subscription-based and resides in a large array of over 1,000 servers that are owned and maintained by Linden Lab which provides its users, which are known as residents, the various tools to create and modify their own identities as well as the world and economy around them.

According to Linden Lab, the creators and hosts of Second Life, (Linden Lab, 2008a) the Second Life world is best described as an immense digital landscape that is populated with interesting people, entertainment avenues, unusual experiences, and where opportunities abound. Residents can walk or fly, drive, or teleport to various places; communicate with others; participate in events; create, buy, sell, market, and trade objects with other residents; build real world-like facilities and environments; attend lectures and classes; and engage in experiential learning. Second Life supports an economy with a common currency (known as the Linden Dollar) in an open market (Linden Lab, 2008a). Residents can participate in the economy in a variety of ways including owning, building, and selling property as well by creating entrepreneurial endeavors. As of June of 2008, the total Linden Dollar L$ supply was $5,045,956,125 and there were approximately

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