

Chapter 51

Opening the Content Pipeline for OpenSim–Based Virtual Worlds

Shenlei E. Winkler
Fashion Research Institute, Inc, USA

ABSTRACT

Open-Simulator (Open-Sim) refers to a three dimensional application environment that can be used to develop virtual worlds similar to those that exist in Second Life®. Open-Sim is considered open source software, i.e., software that is developed by a community of volunteers and is available for use by the public free of charge (Open Simulator, 2009). Although participants in virtual worlds are generally considered by law to be the owner of any Intellectual Property (IP) they create, content creators and owners of OpenSim-based virtual worlds struggle with issues surrounding licensing, content delivery, and usage in these immersive spaces. The Fashion Research Institute (FRI) is specifically exploring these issues in a case study involving the licensing its Shengri La virtual world creations to external users. This case study is the basis of ongoing legal research by FRI's legal steering committee of attorneys from the American Bar Association's Virtual Worlds and Online Gaming committee who are working on a pro bono (volunteer) basis. This chapter presents the result of the ongoing case study. It offers a practitioner's view of issues related to licensing and distribution of content in virtual worlds.

INTRODUCTION

The coming diaspora of content creators from closed grids such as Second Life® to other open source, open grids run on the OpenSim platform offer both exciting opportunities as well as dangerous pitfalls for the unprepared. Opening new

marketplaces to content creators has the ability to add appreciably to the global marketplace, with virtual goods accounting for \$2.6 billion in sales in 2008 (Virtual Goods News, 2009), with that number expected to increase exponentially in the near future.

Participants in virtual worlds consider the content they create to be their own Intellectual Property (IP). However, these content creators with several

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2136-7.ch051

issues involving the licensing, content delivery, and usage of their creations. “The intersection of intellectual property laws and the virtual world raises a panoply of issues and concerns...” (Kane & Duranske, 2008, p. 12). The Fashion Research Institute (FRI) is currently involved in a case study designed to explore the issues involved in the licensing of content created for its *Shengri La* virtual world. This case study is the result of collaboration among FRI’s legal steering committee of attorneys from the American Bar Association’s Virtual Worlds and Online Gaming committee who are working on a *pro bono* (volunteer) basis.

Content creation for these OpenSim-based grids requires an appreciable amount of time and dedication by content creators. The current technology is limited and much of the time is spent re-developing the same content for each virtual area or grid where they wish their content to be available. Although OpenSim Archive Resource (OAR) files do enable some content creators to develop content once, and move it around as OAR files, most content creators lack the knowledge to perform this function.

It is anticipated that upcoming technology advances will enable these content creators to readily move their content around and make it more widely and readily available. Before content creators will accept these new technology solutions and make their content available to commercial grid operators, legal considerations governing the licensing of their content need to be addressed. These include the functional legal definition of terms which are generally accepted by the legal community; the development of content quality standards against which content may be assessed and qualified; the deployment of development frameworks to help ensure that content creators can issue certificates of originality and produce documentation to prove authenticity of their content; and finally, the standardization of contractual agreements between content creators and users, content creators and grid operators, and grid operators and users.

The following chapter focuses on these considerations in the context of an existing case study involving the content developers at Fashion Research Institute (FRI) and engineers at Intel® Labs. In this case study, large-scale, complex virtual builds and creations are developed on both FRI and Intel hardware. The content is continually moved back and forth between the hardware servers of the two companies. The existing agreement between FRI and Intel defines the use of this content for research, and serves as a test bed to help determine additional licensing issues related to content development, content curation, and management needs.

BACKGROUND

“There is widespread potential for copyright infringement in virtual worlds and, indeed, there is widespread infringement of copyrights” (Ibid, p. 13). Licensing content into virtual worlds is often compared to the settling of the American ‘Wild West’ with content developers claiming new space and pitting themselves against content thieves and other risks. There is also confusion within the content developer community about how the terms of service (TOS) and end user licensing agreement (EULA) of a given virtual world impacts their intellectual property ownership and protection of their rights. Many content producers, who develop virtual goods for sale and use in these immersive spaces are understandably leery of exposing themselves to the risk of loss of their intellectual property when moving into a new virtual world where the TOS and EULA may be even less well understood. With the advent of low barrier-to-entry worlds such as Second Life® and OpenSim, licensing considerations for managing a recognized brand and protecting brand extension become even more pressing.

11 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/opening-content-pipeline-opensim-based/71018

Related Content

Public Policy Issues and Technoethics in Marketing Research in the Digital Age

Pratap Chandra Mandal (2021). *International Journal of Technoethics* (pp. 75-86).

www.irma-international.org/article/public-policy-issues-and-technoethics-in-marketing-research-in-the-digital-age/269436

The New Digital Wave of Rationalization: A Loss of Autonomy

Lambèr Royakkersand Rinie van Est (2020). *International Journal of Technoethics* (pp. 59-74).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-new-digital-wave-of-rationalization/258848

Ordinary Technoethics

Michel Puech (2013). *International Journal of Technoethics* (pp. 36-45).

www.irma-international.org/article/ordinary-technoethics/90487

A Paradox Between Technological Autonomy and Ethical Heteronomy of Philosophy of Technology: Social Control System

GuiHong Cao (2013). *International Journal of Technoethics* (pp. 52-66).

www.irma-international.org/article/paradox-between-technological-autonomy-ethical/77367

The Hellenic Framework for Computer Program Copyright Protection Following the Implementation of the Relative European Union Directives

Eugenia Alexandropoulou-Egyptiadou (2013). *Digital Rights Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 738-745).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/hellenic-framework-computer-program-copyright/71000