

From Interactive to Immersive: Marketing Education takes a Virtual Leap of Faith

Natalie T. Wood, Saint Joseph's University
Michael R. Solomon, Saint Joseph's University
Lyle R. Wetsch, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Ken Hudson, Managing, Loyalist College
David Allan, Saint Joseph's University

Natalie T. Wood is an Assistant Professor of Marketing and Assistant Director of the Center of Consumer Research at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. She can be reached at nwood@sju.edu

Michael R. Solomon is Professor of Marketing and Director of the Center for Consumer Research at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. He can be reached at msolom01@sju.edu

Lyle R. Wetsch is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada. He can be reached at LWestch@mun.ca

Ken Hudson is Managing Director of the Virtual World Design Centre at Loyalist College in Canada. He can be reached at kenhudson@infinitespaces.ca

David Allan is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. He can be reached at dallan@sju.edu

From Interactive to Immersive: Marketing Education takes a Virtual Leap of Faith

Virtual worlds are 3-D computer-mediated environments that offer rich visual interfaces and real-time communication with other residents. In the past 18 months alone approximately \$1.5 billion has been invested in companies developing technologies for virtual worlds. Management Consulting Company McKinsey & Company predicts that “Virtual worlds such as Second Life will become an indispensable business tool and vital to the strategy of any company intent on reaching out to the video-game generation” (Richards, 2008).

To date numerous companies including IBM and GE and more than 100 schools and educational institutions from more than 20 countries are using virtual worlds not only as marketing tool but also as an instructional one (Rzewnicki 2007). For example, Whyville (www.whyville.com) is an example of a virtual world for middle school-aged children with over 1.7 million registered users and 20,000 - 25,000 unique daily visitors (Whyville Educational Outreach 2007). Active Worlds (www.activeworlds.com), another education-based virtual world, is home to 80 educational institutions worldwide, the majority of which are colleges and universities (Active Worlds and Education 2007). Second life attracts both universities and corporations.

At this point within this young field there is only a small body of research that examines the use of virtual worlds for instructional purposes. This literature largely originates from the arts and sciences (for one notable exception see Wood, Solomon and Allan 2008; Peterson 2006) and we can find ongoing dialogues in fields including medical and health education (Kamel Boulos Hetherington and Wheeler 2007; Scott, 2007; Skiba 2007); foreign languages (Svensson 2003); English composition; education pedagogy (“Real Learning in a Virtual World” 2006); scientific research (Bainbridge 2007); and library services (Swanson 2007).

Reports from these disparate fields strongly suggest that the game-based learning opportunities in virtual worlds offer great educational promise (Kamel Boulos, Hetherington and Wheeler 2007). These new platforms provide educators with the opportunity to create real-life simulations in a safe environment to enhance experiential learning; thus, they offer a risk-free way for students to practice skills, try new ideas, and learn from their mistakes.

Despite the impressive statistics and the array of opportunities awaiting those willing to make the virtual leap, many corporations, educational institutions and even governments are still scrambling to identify the strategic benefits of participating and the best practices for virtual education. For instance, many universities feel pressure to be in-world -- perhaps simply because a neighboring institution has announced its intention to be there. Unfortunately, these universities may have little idea about how to go about creating a campus and then what to do once they have planted their flag in this strange new land. The purpose of this session is to address these widespread concerns by offering recommendations to those intrigued with the concept of virtual world learning but who lack the knowledge, skills and firsthand experience to fully embrace this technology. Through these three presentations conference attendees will be taken through the process from start to finish.

Our first group of presenters explores the process of creating a virtual campus. Drawing on their experience in building a virtual university campus they document their attempts to construct a university-wide platform to maximize the use of scarce resources and to harmonize the university's branding architecture while retaining the freedom for each participating unit to innovate within the space. Next, our second presenter shares his experiences with motivating and training over 400 participants to utilize Second Life for pedagogical purposes. Finally, our

third presenter discusses his efforts at incorporating Second Life into his undergraduate and graduate e-marketing courses, offering practical advice for those wishing to venture in-world.

Staking Your Claim in the Land Rush of Virtual World Education: How to Build a Second Life Campus

Natalie T. Wood, Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia
Michael R. Solomon, Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia
David Allan, Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia PA

What is the optimal point-of-entry for a university that wants to establish an online presence?

We believe that most initiatives suffer from two crucial flaws: First, often the goal is to push the pedagogical envelope by integrating Second Life experiences into extant online learning programs. Second, most institutions construct their presence in an organic, bottom-up manner where one individual (or department) takes the initiative to enter the space. As interest grows, other departments then “pile on.” As laudable as these approaches may be they can also create a number of structural, functional, administrative and branding problems. Drawing on our experiences we advocate and propose a top-down approach that begins with a holistic view of the campus at large and anticipates coordinated, long-term institutional growth in Second Life.

Inspiration and Engagement: Fueling a Second Life Program

Ken Hudson, Loyalist College, Belleville, ON, Canada

The success of any educational project in Second Life hinges on the ability to convert ideas into action by engaging a community of users, and supporting their experience. There are four main stages to building a Second Life program from seeding initial interest through to project completion: 1. Cultivation: Inspiring potential users about the opportunities using Second Life for education, 2. Focus: Defining projects with specific timetables, requirements,

technology assessments and outcomes, 3. Training: Providing adequate and ongoing training including orientation, standards, hands-on and in-world instruction leading to comfort level proficiency, and, 4. Community: Supporting the social aspects of the experience. From this presentation conference attendees will learn strategies for effectively engaging a community of users in Second Life.

Tales from the (Virtual) Trenches: Benefits and Challenges of Integrating ‘Second Life’ into Face-to-Face Marketing Courses

Lyle R. Wetsch, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada

Providing an interactive, immersive environment can enhance student learning for students in a wide variety of disciplines. The benefits and challenges of integrating a virtual world component in a regular class as a means of providing an increased experience are discussed from both the professor and students perspectives. This presentation is based on the incorporation of the virtual world ‘Second Life’ into both undergraduate and graduate “e-Marketing” courses. The integration of the virtual world complemented the in class experience in a number of ways including providing students with the opportunity to explore a wide range of marketing efforts that both in-world and real world businesses are undertaking. Lessons learned from these courses will provide insight for others wishing to enhance their in class teaching with a component with one of the virtual worlds.

References

- Active Worlds and Education*. (2007). Retrieved November 16, 2007, from Active Worlds:
<http://www.activeworlds.com>
- Bainbridge, W. S. (2007). The Scientific Research Potential of Virtual Worlds. *Science* , 317 (5837), 472-476.
- Kamel Boulos, M. N., Hetherington, L., & Wheeler, S. (2007). Second Life: An Overview of the Potential of 3-D Virtual Worlds in Medical and Health Education. *Health Information and Libraries Journal* , 24, 233-245.
- Peterson, M. (2006a). Learner Interaction Management in an Avatar and Chat-based Virtual World. *Computer Assisted Language Learning* , 19 (1), 79-103.
- Real Learning in a Virtual World*. (2006, October 5). Retrieved March 15, 2008, from The Christian Science Monitor: <http://www.csmonitor.com>
- Richards, J. (2008, April 23). *McKinsey: ignore Second Life at your peril*. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from Times Online: <http://technology.timesonline.co.uk>
- Rzewnicki, A. (2007, November 5). *Professors, in avatar mode, begin to work in Second Life*. Retrieved November 5, 2007, from NC State University: <http://www.mgmt.nsu.edu>
- Scott, D. (2007). Learning the Second Way. *Medical Education* , 335, 1122-1123.
- Skiba, D. J. (2007). Nursing Education 2.0: Second Life. *Nursing Education Perspectives* , 28 (3), 156-157.
- Svensson, P. (2003). Virtual Worlds as Arenas for Language Learning. In U. Felix (Ed.), *Language Learning Online: Towards Best Practice* (pp. 123-142). Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Swanson, K. (2007). Second Life: A Science Library Presence in Virtual Reality. *Science & Technology Libraries* , 27 (3), 79-86.
- Whyville Educational Outreach*. (2007). Retrieved November 15, 2007, from Whyville:
www.whyville.com
- Wood, N. T., Solomon, M. R., & Allan, D. (2008). Enter the Matrix: e-learning gets a Second Life. *Marketing Education Review* ,(Summer) In press.