

New Ventures in Virtual Worlds

Guest Editors

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Virtual worlds are becoming increasingly sophisticated, enabling organizations and individuals to “step into the internet.” A virtual world is a computer-based simulated environment where individuals assume an identity as an avatar. Avatars inhabit the virtual worlds and interact with each other via computer-based chat or more recently, voice. Virtual worlds are common in multiplayer online games (such as Citypixel), virtual environments (such as Second Life), and role-playing games (such as Lineage). Due to increasing broadband internet access, virtual worlds are rapidly emerging as an alternative means to the real world for communicating, collaborating, and organizing economic activity. For example, one of the most popular teen worlds, Habbo Hotel, has approximately 7.5 million unique users; and Cyworld, a combination of Second Life and MySpace, has more video traffic than YouTube and boasts that 96 percent of all 20- to 30-year-olds in Korea are users.¹ In the virtual world Second Life, more than 50 multinational organizations, such as Adidas, BMW, IBM, and Vodafone conduct operations; Harvard is holding classes; over 400 individuals earn more than USD 2,000 in net profit monthly through their online activities²; and Anshe Chung, the avatar for a Chinese-born woman living in Germany with 25 employees in China, became the first USD millionaire resulting from her virtual real estate activities.³ Companies such as Protonmedia and Qwaq provide Fortune 500 companies, such as Johnson & Johnson, Novartis, Motorola, Intel, completely secure, private virtual business worlds to collaborate and conduct economic activities.

Virtual worlds have risen so quickly that there has been limited time to examine impacts on the workplace. A critical question for organizations and investors burned by the dotcom era is, “Are we seeing a new internet revolution or is this simply another bubble of irrational exuberance?”

Increasingly, the borders between work, play, and learning dissolve as the demands of the virtual gaming generation are fundamentally changing how and where work gets done (Beck and Wade 2006; Johnson 2006). Gartner Group predicts 80 percent of all active internet users and Fortune 500 enterprises will have an avatar or a presence in a virtual world by 2012.⁴ Virtual world development is still in its infancy, and we are just beginning to explore and understand how activities in a virtual world enhance or replace real world economic and social activities. There is a pressing need to develop an understanding of emerging virtual world dynamics and potential competitive, organizational, and legal issues.

¹Computer Sweden, <http://computersweden1.idg.se/2.2683/1.110503>.

²Second Life, http://www.secondlife.com/whatis/economy_stats.php.

³Second Life Herald, http://www.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2006/11/its_official_an.html, and CNNMoney.com, <http://money.cnn.com/blogs/legalpad/2006/11/anshe-chung-first-virtual-millionaire.html>.

⁴Gartner Group, April 2007, <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=503861>.

This special issue of *MIS Quarterly* is designed to stimulate discussion and investigation of virtual worlds, and the potential business and organizational issues related to competitive advantage, organizational design, legal rights, etc. All lenses of inquiry into the nature of virtual worlds are encouraged, including strategic, organizational, behavioral, legal, economic, and technical. The special issue welcomes theoretical, analytical, and empirical (using any kind of research method, including case studies, simulations, surveys, and so on) examinations of topics in this area. Submissions must relate to the editorial objective of *MIS Quarterly* (i.e., the enhancement and communication of knowledge concerning the development of IT-based services, management of information technology resources, and the economics and use of information technology with managerial and organizational implications) and to be rigorously executed with significant theoretical and practical contributions to information systems research. The research topics addressed in the papers might relate to some of the issues above or could also include

- What are the new business models and strategies that are likely to thrive in virtual worlds (or not)?
- Do virtual worlds represent a disruptive innovation for organizations, or just an additional channel to support electronic commerce?
- What products and services translate effectively to virtual worlds?
- What are the implications for image, branding, and advertising, especially in the areas of product and concept development and testing in virtual worlds?
- What are the dynamics underlying consumer behavior and consumer acceptance in virtual worlds?
- How do organizational boundaries blur through customer integration and collaboration in virtual worlds?
- What are the potential areas of cross-selling in real and virtual worlds?
- How are organizations using virtual worlds to support their human resources function (e.g., recruiting, training, education)?
- How can organizations leverage virtual world dynamics to support intra-organizational virtual teams?
- To what degree are virtual worlds influencing the workplace and how and where work gets done?
- How do individuals coordinate and cooperate in ad hoc virtual teams?
- How/why do communities develop in virtual worlds and what are their dynamics?
- How are educational institutions leveraging virtual worlds?
- What are the necessary financial systems, investments, and currency exchange requirements to support growth and innovation in virtual worlds?
- What are the key technical and security issues emerging around the development and use of virtual worlds?
- What are the legal and ethical issues concerning intellectual property and how are organizations protecting and managing copyright and trademark laws in virtual worlds?
- Where do we see convergence between real and virtual worlds?

Timetable

September 15, 2008	Papers Due
December 15, 2008	First Round Reviews Complete
March 15, 2009	First Round Revisions from Authors Due
March 26, 2009	Special Issue Workshop at University of Texas at Austin
April 15, 2009	Feedback from Workshop sent to Authors
July 1, 2009	Second Round Revisions from Authors Due
September 1, 2009	Second Round Reviews Complete
November 1, 2009	Final Decision on Papers to be Included in the Special Issue

Process

Authors will receive an initial screening, and only papers deemed to have a reasonable chance of acceptance after two or three rounds of accelerated review will enter the process. Papers that do not pass this initial screening will not be considered further. A maximum of three rounds of review will be undertaken. If papers are not accepted by the end of the third round of reviews, the papers will be rejected. The third round of revisions will be undertaken if changes are relatively straightforward and do not encompass major revisions to the paper. Authors are expected to adhere to the schedule above for submission and revision of papers. Papers that miss the deadlines will be removed from the review process.

The first round of reviews will be provided within 3 months of original submission. The authors will have 3 months to complete the revision and will be invited to a workshop at the University of Texas at Austin approximately 2 weeks after the First Round Revisions are submitted. The authors will be responsible for paying for their travel and accommodations in connection with the workshop. Only meals during the workshop will be provided. Feedback from the workshop will be sent to the authors approximately 3 weeks after the workshop, and Second Round Revisions will then be due 2.5 months later. The second round of reviews will be provided within 2 months of the receipt of second round revisions. A final decision will be made within 2 months of the receipt of the second revision of the paper.

References

- Beck, J. C., and Wade, M. 2006. *The Kids Are Alright: How the Gamer Generation Is Changing the Workplace*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Johnson, S. 2006. *Everything Bad Is Good for You*. New York: Berkeley Publishing Group.

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