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Second Life Versus First Life Advice Offered



Swivel Media's Erik Hauser offers us this column on his in-depth experience with Second Life, **ahead of the curve** work for Wells Fargo and his companies creation of Stagecoach Island a virtual reality world based on Second Life. He offers sage advice to marketers with Second Life on the brain.

Retro-Marketing

Marketing to People in Their First Life

By Erik Hauser 10.25.06

I can vaguely recall the days when things were very different.

People spent their time in a world filled with oxygen. It seems just like yesterday - OH MY - it was yesterday! Let's take a trip down memory lane shall we? The date is Jan 1st 1997, and people are starting to spend some time on this thing called the internet. Within a couple of years there was a hyper-saturated web with niche sites that had everything from exclusive guides to websites designed as destination locations for people in their mid 30's that had an affinity for poodles. Certain people claimed they would never leave the house again, and vowed to radically change their behavior.



Now we find ourselves in the 21st Century and the year 2006. The internet has just recently started living up to a portion of its hype. More people are connected than ever before. The internet is by far the greatest way to disseminate information to the masses at lightning speed that's ever been found. I learned this myself by building an on-line community. Turns out that people from around the world had similar things that they wanted to talk about - surprise!

In my case, I am referring to experiential marketing. In this day and age, people spend dramatically more time on-line than marketers ever thought they would back in the early days.

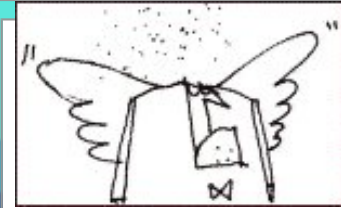
But now, let's direct our attention to a current on-line phenomenon that has recently been discovered by the media. I am referring to the on-line role-playing game Second Life produced by Linden Labs. It's a phenomenal platform that allows endless virtual freedoms in a world without oxygen. However, Second Life is a world in major transition. It is instructive and interesting as a marketer to be able to watch what is going on in that "brave new virtual world".

I was acquainted with Second Life even before it launched. It was astonishing to see the technology they had developed, and I anxiously awaited how it would be accepted by the public. As with any ahead of it's time technology it was immediately embraced by technological innovators and early adopters. There was a small group of around 35,000 residents that felt like they had died and gone to heaven. They found a computing platform that allowed them to do things that they had dreamed of, but were never able to do before.

These first residents wanted to create a new world far from the masses in first life. Back when we launched Stagecoach Island for Wells Fargo we were very careful not to intrude. We built a separate private branded entrance, and our island was separate from the Second Life MMORPG. There are many

unlimited networking

Branding Is Dead



ugh "cartoons drawn on the back of business cards" macleod is a creative director who writes about **the new, happy, fun, grim meathook realities** of marketing and advertising.

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reasons from the brand perspective why we did this, but there were other reasons that had more to do with the respect we have for the in-world residents and our own sense of how to reach people in a meaningful way on behalf of our clients.

The most important was that we believed the Second Life residents (innovators) wouldn't have wanted us throwing up a corporate bank in the middle of their Utopia. We respected that and were looking to build a brand experience that wouldn't intrude into anybody's virtual reality, but rather allow for a new experience in which young adults could play and learn, utilizing an exciting interactive platform. We were able to find a happy medium. Remember, experiential marketing is about not interrupting folks, but providing the possibility for people to participate in a positive brand experience if they choose to.

I am amazed everyday at what is taking place in Second Life. The early residents are, and have been, feverishly working to pass things like the virtual bill of rights etc. These innovators are still the ones that make up the majority of the full-time residents. Second Life went to a free membership model sometime ago. This allowed for a lot of "lookie-loos" to dip a toe in the water and rarely, if ever, come back. The full-time residents are not happy with the influx of corporations into their world. Is this bad, or is this just the inevitable, natural evolution of any society?

Second Life has recently positioned itself in mainstream media as a viable platform for marketers to ply their trade. Because of it, brands are jumping in feet first without even really asking themselves if they are wanted there. Many brand marketers don't know what questions to ask the agencies that are working for them. They want to provide a compelling and pleasant brand experience, but fail to realize they have dropped themselves in a world where the majority of the population is not interested in first life issues, and does not want them there. Unfortunately, unless they immerse themselves in the world and

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understand its residents they can't know how to integrate themselves in a relevant way for the people involved.

Are brands applying the same strategies in the virtual world as they are in the oxygenated world? In the oxygenated world brands try to connect with their audiences for the purpose of creating a relationship and a call to action: buy. Do their audiences exist in the virtual worlds, and if so, is it a place they want to see you? These are the types of questions that must be considered before entering virtual worlds.

Is the rush of brands into Second Life a bad thing? If you look at life as a great philosopher once said, "There is no good, there is no bad, there just is," then you must simply look at what is taking place in Second Life as natural progression - a virtual evolution if you will. Soon, the original residents that don't like what's happening will move on to find or build their next Utopia. Second Life may become a hotspot for many new residents. I will be very interested to see statistical data that shows the average number of visits from residents and window shoppers in Second Life, and the average time spent there. Like research in first life - what are the residents doing and where are they doing it? How do we reach them in a way that positively affects their Second Life and impacts our brands in their first - which is where, we all know for the most part, they buy our goods and services? These questions and answers are what will truly inform if, and how, marketers move forward in a world without oxygen. I'm watching, and listening, and holding my breath.

Written by Steve Hall [Comments \(5\)](#) File: [Consumer Created, Good, Online, Opinion, Social, Trends and](#)

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