

# Missing the Meta Picture

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Infinitely Small Digital Conversations - Limitless Digital Possibilities

Part 1 of 6

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In regard to the infinite realm of possibilities and space that exist in the digital landscapes of mysterious metaverses, the conversations have been incredibly small. I don't understand it - really. I jokingly said when I was speaking at Stanford's MediaX that Second Life was the equivalent of AOL to the Internet back in 1996. Most people didn't know that there was a difference between AOL and the Internet - they thought they were one and the same. Look where AOL is now!

We must get 10 inquiries a week wanting to talk to me about the work that we've done in virtual worlds - mainly focused on Second Life. The reality, of course, is that we used the Linden Lab platform without becoming part of the mystical world of Second Life. However while we were testing on their core platform, Second Life had about 35,000 residents. By the time we were gone they were very slowly eclipsing the 100,000 resident mark.

So the SL question is kind of a moot one for us at Swivel Media, although there are several agencies trying to back track and explain how/why they got their clients to cough up hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars to stake their claim in a land where nobody is essentially home to advertisers. One simply needs to check the dwelling data (MIT's Futurelab is where I found mine) to question these investments. The person who decided being first was that important should be able to explain the substantial up-keep costs they will continue to incur until people do show up - or not. I assume this is the position a lot of people are going to be in soon.

So, what's the answer? Hmm. OK, first let me get you in the proper mind set. The digital space should be strategically approached just like the physical space. What do I mean when I say that? Unless you're a brand that was well ahead of the curve offering one hell of a compelling proposition - you'd better pull out your marketing 101 books: the rules haven't changed despite all the hype. The limited world of Second Life will not be Web 3.0. Will the Internet head in a 3D direction? Absolutely, but it won't be relegated to the walls of any one platform even when they open source the code. You can come out of the gate with a fantastic vision, but last time I checked it was where you finish the race that matters - not where you start. Talk to AOL about that one.

I think the Counting Crows had it right when they sang that it's time to get back to basics. Like I mentioned before, to have a strategy that plants a flag in one metaverse is the equivalent of opening one retail location in the physical space and expecting it to do the sales of 10,000 stores. Yes, the digital space does tear down the geographic barriers that exist in the physical space, but that doesn't mean that C3 (convenience, control and choice) aren't going to rule the digital dynamic as well. Even the digital representations of self want more than one place to explore, ESPECIALLY since they can cover more digital terrain than they can in the physical space. So the whole notion that there will be one platform that meets the needs of everyone is the most insanely ludicrous thing I have ever heard.

Web 3.0 will go through the same maturation process as web 2.0. The behemoths will grow, and then people will feel like they have lost touch by trying to be everything to everyone instead of catering to a more refined and niche audience. It is the equivalent of what is happening to MySpace right now. Gamers that have a MySpace account may go back to MySpace once in a while, but are more likely to frequent a site that taps their passion points with a stronger tap - sites like The Great Games Experiment.

So, for now I will simply watch history repeat itself again and again and again. What's the right play? That's the next article;..Let me live in the mystery for a little while longer - that's where I feel most comfortable.