

Virtual Community

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This talk

- Richard spoke about the difference between identity and identification.
- I'll be explaining what the social groups in virtual worlds do, who forms them, what they mean to the participants and how the relationships that emerge become bonds that evolve into something greater than what happens in "just a game", but can have implications for offline business as well.
- As an example...



Social groups can look like this...



...or they can look like this:



- London Memorial in the virtual world *Second Life*
- Between 12-1pm on 7 July 2005, over 150 *Second Life* residents visited. It was open for 7 days and racked up thousands of visitors
- Fewer than 10% claimed any British ties
- Maker's motivations were altruistic and purely community-driven

Virtual Communities: What they do



- Game goals
 - Kill things
 - Solve things
 - Create things
 - Advance their abilities
- Social Goals
 - Chatting about this and that
 - Make friends
 - Try on different identities
 - Develop social networks and kudos

Social Life of Virtual Worlds



- Who goes online for social reasons?
 - Depends upon the game, depends upon the player
- Refresher on Richard's statistics
- Most players are in guilds
 - Guilds are in-game groups
- Socialising effects how long community members stick around
 - Social types play more often and for longer
 - Strong community ties means dollars and cents for the companies responsible for putting these products together
- Why do people socialise?
 - Psychological mumbo-jumbo
 - Teamwork

Virtual Communities: Who they are



- Demographics
- Boundaries and norms
 - Maintenance: Mr. Bungle, The Sims Online Mafia and Virtual Sit-ins
- Hierarchies
 - Guild leaders are older and female
 - New ideas and innovations **must** be vetted by group leaders within the existing social norm structures of the virtual community
 - Exit and entry rituals
- Demarcation – badges of honour as reputation

Reputation



- Reputation is the basis for all relationships in virtual worlds.
 - Think eBay
- How can you tell an avatar's reputation?
- There are the obvious physical signs, but importantly...
- It's based on trust
 - Which is based on past experience...
 - ...which is either based upon functional goals or pre-existing social relationships...
 - ...or some kind of disinterested third party

Virtual Community: Second Life



- Good comparison with other, more traditional forms of virtual community, like Chatrooms
 - Discussions, creations
 - Set in game-like world
- Over 45,000 residents
- Approximately 20,000 of them active (log on once a month)

Virtual Communities of SL



- Neualtenburg
 - “Ownership, Collaboration, Government”
 - 23 citizens with an elaborate government structure
 - “In the real world the Neualtenburg Projekt exists as a nonprofit cooperative which shares the [subscription costs] and flattens the regressive land-use fees of [Linden Lab], making it less expensive for small landowners to hold land. In the virtual world the project is a small regional government within the government of LL, providing community-shared infrastructure, democratic control of the region, and a cohesive architectural theme.”
 - Also seeking “investors”

Virtual Communities of SL



- Live2Give
 - “An innovative online community for people dealing with Cerebral Palsy and similar conditions.”
- Brigadoon
 - “An innovative online community for people dealing with Asperger’s Syndrome and Autism.”
- One-offs
 - Fashion shows
 - Fundraising
 - London Memorial
 - Cancer walk
 - Katrina

How is any of this useful?



- Transfer to the “real” world
 - 73% of online newsgroups got together in real world in 1999
 - RMT: in-world entrepreneurs are making money by selling to virtual communities
- Offline Business applications
 - Reaching distributed populations
 - Prototyping and market researching
 - Avalon and Mrs. Jones
 - Wells Fargo
 - In-game branding

In Sum



- Virtual communities operate in very similar ways to other communities – both on and offline
- They bring together distributed individuals based on common experience, motivations and reputation
- This is particularly true for virtual world participants because of the explicit social design of the software
- There is a great potential for crossover between the two spheres, BUT any new implementations should be carefully integrated within the existing social norms of these valuable virtual communities

Thank You
Questions?

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