

VIRTUAL WORLDS

WHY IDENTITY IS IMPORTANT

DIGITAL IDENTITY FORUM

25TH OCTOBER 2005

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INTRODUCTION

- WELCOME TO THE "EVERYONE ARRIVES **LATE** AND **MISSSES IT**" SESSION
- THIS CONFERENCE IS ABOUT **DIGITAL IDENTITY**
– ACTUALLY, I SUSPECT MOST OF IT WILL BE ABOUT DIGITAL **IDENTIFICATION...**
- **MY** TASK IS TO SHOW YOU A GLIMPSE OF THE Future
- DIGITAL IDENTITY IS BEING **CREATED**, WORN, DISCARDED AND **RECREATED** RIGHT NOW IN **VIRTUAL WORLDS**
- I GUESS I SHOULD EXPLAIN WHAT THESE **ARE**, HUH?

WHAT ARE VWS?

- VIRTUAL WORLDS ARE **PLACES**
- BEING PLACES, THEY HAVE A NUMBER OF PLACE-LIKE **FEATURES**
 - YOU CAN **VISIT** THEM
 - **OTHER** PEOPLE CAN **ALSO** VISIT THEM
 - AT THE **SAME TIME**
- THEY ARE, HOWEVER, **NOT REAL**
- THIS SEEMS LIKE A MAJOR **DISADVANTAGE**
 - HOW DO YOU **VISIT** SOMEWHERE THAT **ISN'T REAL?**

ANSWER:

- YOU USE AN **AVATAR**
 - OR, MORE TECHNICALLY SPEAKING, A **CHARACTER**



ABOUT AVATARS

- FAR FROM ITS BEING A **DISADVANTAGE**, PEOPLE OFTEN **LIKE** USING AN AVATAR



FURTHERMORE...

- SOME PEOPLE **PREFER** IT TO REALITY



LEISURE TIME

- PEOPLE PLAY THESE GAMES FOR SEVERAL **HOURS** A DAY
 - DAY AFTER DAY
 - MONTH AFTER MONTH
 - YEAR AFTER YEAR...
- I HAVE PLAYERS FOR MY OWN GAME THAT ARE STILL THERE AFTER **15 YEARS**
- SURVEYS HAVE **CONSISTENTLY** SHOWN THAT THE AVERAGE TIME A PLAYER SPENDS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD IS AROUND **20 HOURS** A **WEEK**
 - THEY OFTEN INVEST A LOT OF TIME IN IT **OFFLINE**, TOO

MUD1, 1978

- VIRTUAL WORLDS **USED** TO LOOK LIKE THIS

```
Narrow road between lands.  
You are stood on a narrow road between The Land and whence you came.  
To the north and south are the small foothills of a pair of majestic  
mountains, with a large wall running round. To the west the road  
continues, where in the distance you can see a thatched cottage  
opposite an ancient cemetery. The way out is to the east, where a  
shroud of mist covers the secret pass by which you entered The  
Land. It is raining.  
*w  
Narrow road.  
You are on a narrow east-west road with a forest to the north and  
Gorse scrub to the south. It is raining. A splendid necklace lies  
on the ground.  
*
```

- ONE PERSON WORKING ALONE COULD WRITE A SUCH WORLD

10K, 1981

- THEN THEY STARTED LOOKING LIKE THIS

```
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] - - [ ] orc sword shield chain
[ ] A          S [ ] A Jennie.c
/ > ++++ [ ] A 2 skeletons
[ ] ++++ [ ] B trolls
[ ] B          dn [ ]
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

Swing hits with moderate damage
Skeleton is slain
Orc is blocked by your armour
Troll: kia ardata luuppatar ne

>throw bottle at troll
R mace   Hits      Hits On   Stamina  Exper.  M. Pnts.
L bottle 35         5         10       6523   9
```

KOD, 1992

- THEN LIKE THIS



UO, 1997

- THEN LIKE THIS



WOW, 2004

- NOW, THEY LOOK LIKE THIS



STATS

- *WORLD OF WARCRAFT* HAS OVER **4,000,000** PLAYERS WORLDWIDE
 - THE SAME POPULATION AS **NORWAY**
- PLAYERS PAY **\$15** A **MONTH** TO PLAY
 - \$13 IF BUY 6 MONTHS AT ONCE
 - SOMEWHAT **LESS** IN CHINA...
- IT COST SOMETHING LIKE **\$30M** TO DEVELOP
 - I'VE SEEN ESTIMATES BETWEEN \$25M AND \$70M
- MOST OF THE DEVELOPMENT COSTS GO ON **artwork** AND CONTENT

THE WEST LAGS

- THIS MAY **SOUND** IMPRESSIVE, BUT **SOUTH KOREA** IS THE WORLD LEADER HERE
 - **25,000,000** PEOPLE HAVE TRIED *LINEAGE* OR *LINEAGE II* AT LEAST ONCE
 - **35,000,000** PEOPLE HAVE ACCOUNTS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD
 - POPULATION OF SOUTH KOREA IS **48,000,000**
- KOREAN GAME **MU ONLINE** HAS **32,000,000** ACCOUNTS IN CHINA AND ANOTHER **10,000,000** ELSEWHERE
 - AND THOSE ARE JUST ON THE **LEGAL** SERVERS!

"ADDICTION"

- SOME PEOPLE SPEND MORE TIME IN **VIRTUAL** WORLDS THAN THEY DO IN THE **REAL** WORLD
 - PEOPLE HAVE **DIED** AT THE KEYBOARD FROM PLAYING 2+ DAYS CONTINUOUSLY WITHOUT SLEEP
- THAILAND HAS A 10PM-6AM **CURFEW** ON VIRTUAL WORLDS
- CHINA HAS A **3 HOUR PER DAY** LIMIT
- ONE PLAYER **MURDERED** HIS FRIEND FOR **SELLING** HIS CHARACTER'S **SWORD**
 - TALKING OF WHICH...

REAL MONEY TRADING

- **RMT** IS WHERE PEOPLE BUY AND SELL THEIR **VIRTUAL** GOODS USING **REAL** MONEY
 - USUALLY **AGAINST** THE WISHES OF THE DEVELOPER
- AS I WRITE THIS, **EBAY** HAS A LEVEL 116 CHARACTER FROM *RUNEQUEST* AT **\$1,425**
- **ITEMBAY** MAKES MORE MONEY FROM RMT THAN **ALL** THE VIRTUAL WORLDS IT SERVICES MAKE IN SUBSCRIPTIONS, **COMBINED**
- WORLD MARKET IS CLOSE TO **₹1,000,000,000** ANNUALLY
 - CONSERVATIVE - COULD BE **20 TIMES** THAT MUCH!

IDENTITY

- RMT IS **UNPOPULAR** AMONG PLAYERS
 - AND NOT **JUST** BECAUSE IT USES REAL MONEY!
- TO UNDERSTAND **WHY**, WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE REASONS PEOPLE PLAY
- UNFORTUNATELY, TO EXPLAIN IN **DETAIL** WOULD TAKE ME **THREE HOURS**
 - HOWEVER, I **CAN** GIVE A SUMMARY IF YOU PROMISE NOT TO **ARGUE** WITH IT
- BASICALLY, PLAYERS PLAY THESE GAMES BECAUSE THEY'RE EXPLORING THEIR OWN SENSE OF **IDENTITY**

WHY PEOPLE PLAY

- PLAYERS PLAY TO **HAVE FUN**
- WHAT "HAVING FUN" MEANS VARIES BETWEEN (CLASSICALLY, **FOUR**) KINDS OF ACTIVITY
- THIS SYSTEM MAPS ON TO THE FAMOUS **HERO'S JOURNEY**, OR **MONOMYTH**
- THOSE WHO **UNDERTAKE** A HERO'S JOURNEY DISCOVER, IN THE PROCESS, WHO THEY **ARE**
 - THEIR **IDENTITY**
- BY BEING SOMEONE **ELSE**, YOU BECOME A BETTER **YOU**
- WHATEVER ADVANCES YOU ON THE HERO'S JOURNEY IS WHAT YOU **CURRENTLY** CONSIDER "FUN"

YES, I KNOW

- THIS LOOKS LIKE PSYCHOLOGICAL **MUMBO-JUMBO**, BUT JUST REMEMBER THOSE **STATS** I GAVE YOU EARLIER...
- OK, SO WHY **IS** REAL MONEY TRADING SO **DISLIKED**?
- WELL, BECAUSE IT LETS PEOPLE **SHORT-CUT** THEIR HERO'S JOURNEY – IT BREAKS THE **MAGIC CIRCLE**
 - WHY SPEND A **YEAR** WORKING UP A LEVEL 60 CHARACTER IF YOU CAN JUST **BUY** ONE ON EBAY?
- IT UNDERMINES THE SENSE OF **ACHIEVEMENT** THAT'S NECESSARY TO **COMPLETE** THE JOURNEY
 - LIKE BUYING THE **WORLD RECORD** FOR 100 METRES...

STOPPING RMT

- DEVELOPERS HAVE TRIED TO **STOP** RMT, BUT HAVE SO FAR **FAILED**
- THEY **COULD** STOP IT, BUT IT WOULD BE **COSTLY**
 - CHARACTER TRANSFERS GO **THROUGH** THE GAME OPERATOR, SO CAN ALWAYS BE **PREVENTED**
 - BUT MANY OF THESE ARE **LEGITIMATE** TRANSFERS
 - LOTS OF PLAYERS **DON'T** HAVE CREDIT CARDS
 - NO TRANS-NATIONAL **ID CARDS** EITHER

REPUTATION

- ANOTHER PROBLEM IS THAT PLAYERS ARE **PSEUDONYMOUS**
 - YOU CAN TELL THE SAME PERSON IS PLAYING A CHARACTER, BUT NOT WHO THAT IS IN REAL LIFE
- PLAYERS TEND TO **LIKE** THIS FOR THEMSELVES, BUT **DISLIKE** IT FOR OTHERS
 - TOO EASY TO GET **GRIEFED**
- IF PEOPLE CAN SWITCH IDENTITIES **EASILY**, MANY WILL DO SO FOR nefarious PURPOSES

FAILED SOLUTIONS

- DEVELOPERS TRIED TO ADDRESS THIS USING **REPUTATION** SYSTEMS
 - THIS WAS **BEFORE** EBAY DID IT
 - REMEMBER, THESE GAMES GO BACK **DECADES...**
- **NONE** OF THESE WORKED
- REASON: THESE ARE **GAMERS** – THEY ALWAYS FOUND A WAY TO **GAME** THE SYSTEM
 - VOTE + FOR EACH OTHER, - FOR ENEMIES
 - KEEP UNTAINTED ACCOUNTS TO “BREAK” CLIQUES
 - SIMILAR TECHNIQUES USED TO CHEAT GOOGLE NOW

DIGITAL ID MANAGEMENT

- PLAYERS HAVE THEREFORE DEVELOPED THEIR **OWN** DEFENCES AGAINST BREAKING THEIR **MAGIC CIRCLE**
- THEY INTERACT ONLY WITH **TRUSTED** FRIENDS
 - TRUSTED BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN **UNDER FIRE** TOGETHER AND **COME THROUGH**
- THEY FORM **SOCIAL GROUPS**
 - ALEKS WILL TALK ABOUT THIS ANON
- THEY ARE **POLITE** TO, BUT SUSPICIOUS OF, OTHER, UNFAMILIAR GROUPS

IN OTHER WORDS

- IN OTHER WORDS, THEY MAY **LOOK** LIKE THEY'RE PLAYING WITH 5,000 OTHER PEOPLE, BUT **ACTUALLY** THEY'RE JUST PLAYING WITH **HALF A DOZEN**
- THEY MEASURE THEIR PROGRESS AGAINST THEIR **PARTY** OR **GUILD**, NOT THE ENTIRE PLAYER BASE
- IF OTHER PEOPLE "CHEAT" THE GAME, THAT'S FINE
 - IF THEY CHEAT THE **PLAYERS**, THAT'S **NOT** FINE
 - **UNLESS** THAT'S PART OF THE GAME!

WHAT THIS SHOWS

- IN SITUATIONS WHERE **ANYONE** CAN BE **ANYONE ELSE**, PEOPLE INTERACT BEST WITH THOSE THEY trust
- THEY FORM RELATIONSHIPS WITH **PLAYERS**, NOT WITH **CHARACTERS**
- WHEN A **CHARACTER** CHANGES, THE PLAYER **DOESN'T** CHANGE
 - PLAYERS **CAN** RECOGNISE THEIR FRIENDS, IF NOT THEIR ENEMIES
 - TELEGRAPH OPERATORS COULD READ "SIGNATURES"

ANSWERS

- MANY OF THE ISSUES THAT **BEDEVILLED** EARLIER ONLINE SYSTEMS JUST **DROP OUT** IN THIS NEW SOCIAL ORDER
- IDENTITIES ARE JUST **CHARACTERS**
 - SO YOU **CAN** HAVE MULTIPLE IDENTITIES – IT **DOESN'T MATTER**
 - THESE IDENTITIES CAN **INTERSECT** OR BE **SEPARATE** – IT **DOESN'T MATTER**
- IT'S NOT THE **REAL-WORLD** YOU THAT'S IMPORTANT, IT'S THE **REAL** YOU THAT IS!

CONCLUSION

- TRUST IS **MUTUAL**, NOT **ONE WAY**
 - ANY REPRESENTATIVES OF BIG BRAND NAMES OUT THERE?
- IF YOU **BETRAY** TRUST, YOU BETRAY ALL YOU INVESTED IN **GAINING** THAT TRUST
 - IT'S STILL GRIEFABLE, BUT FAR LESS SO THAN STYLISED, ROLE-DEFINED INTERACTIONS
- IT'S **WHO** YOU ARE THAT'S IMPORTANT, NOT HOW YOU'RE LABELLED
- **IDENTITY** BEATS **IDENTIFICATION**