

MEMBERS ONLY

EDUCATION

PUBLICATIONS

CW

Archives

Media Kit

Print Submission

CW Bulletin

Books

RESEARCH

ACCREDITATION

AWARDS

JOBS

COMMUNITIES

CHAPTERS

ABOUT IABC

publications

CW Bulletin

CW Bulletin is the e-newsletter supplement to *CW* magazine. Sent each month to all members, every issue of *CW Bulletin* presents articles, case studies and additional resources on timely topics in communication.

 [Printer-friendly](#)  [Feedback](#)  [Logout](#)



Where in the World Is Second Life?

by Anders Gronstedt

Like most corporations, computer maker Dell offers a pop-up list of countries and regions on its web site. But, look closely between Saudi Arabia and Senegal, and you'll find a country called "Second Life." Click on it and you'll find that it's not a country but a world—of the virtual kind.

The link will take you to "Dell City" in Second Life. Created by Linden Labs in the San Francisco Bay Area, this "metaverse" takes interaction and collaboration to unprecedented levels. I could try to explain what this exciting intersection between 3-D world design and socially networked data means, but the best way to learn about it is to experience it.

Find a few minutes to visit secondlife.com and join the more than two million users by opening a free account. Create your own alter ego computer character—your avatar—and wander around. Buy land, build a virtual home, launch a business, make friends, gamble, party, exchange ideas or attend a live Suzanne Vega concert, all online. Such "massive multiplayer online role-playing games" are no longer the sole domain of teenage geeks. Second Life is taking the genre mainstream. The minimum age is 18, and the median age of a Second Life resident is 32. Women log 43 percent of the in-game hours and 40 percent of users—oops, I mean "residents"—live outside the U.S.

Your avatar can be a pink flamingo or a werewolf. Most people create gorgeous Barbie and Ken look-alikes. Not me. My first avatar was as a little green man in a dress—I swear it was my son's idea. My cross-dresser terrified enough people that I had to get him in pants. I steered my avatar, Anders Wildcat, to Dell City to check out Michael Dell's college dorm and design my own Dell computer. To

Discuss this article

Related Resources:

- **Big Media Gets a Second Life**
Media corporations such as *Wired* magazine and Reuters are joining businesses such as Sun Microsystems, Toyota and Wells Fargo in experimenting with establishing a presence in Second Life's virtual world.
- **Starting a Second Life Business**
Tips and ideas for setting up your business and having it succeed in Second Life.
- **American Apparel's Virtual Clothes**
The clothing outfit American Apparel has opened a store in Second Life, hoping to boost their real-life sales.

call this a game is to use the term loosely. There are no tasks and no competition. Instead, people can do whatever they want with their avatars—from hang out with friends to create items to sell to other residents.

How real companies are using Second Life

There's currently a land grab among real-life companies to open up shop in Second Life in order to interact with customers, get publicity and learn firsthand about virtual worlds. Some recent examples include:

- GM's Pontiac division is building a community island for car aficionados. Surrounding its dealership at Motorati Island are 96 virtual acres that GM has bought and will give away, lot by lot, in "land grants" to residents interested in building car-culture oriented businesses.
- At Toyota Scion's virtual dealership you can get cars that are fully customizable, with accessories such as big off-road tires.
- Nissan cars in Second Life are delivered from a vending machine the size of an office building; to get a car you have to get a token from an avatar named Toast Alicious who looks suspiciously like a piece of toast.
- W Hotels has built a prototype of its new Aloft hotel brand inside Second Life. The hotel company has found that the PR value from all the stories written about Aloft in Second Life has given it a huge return on investment.
- Sun, IBM and Dell have all held press conferences in Second Life.

Not everyone is successful. Wells Fargo is still reeling from the uproar in cyberspace from its ill-fated "Stagecoach Island" experiment. They created a closed environment and were not in tune with the Second Life culture. Because of this, Second Life users hacked their way through a closely guarded entrance to vandalize and bad mouth the attraction. Wells Fargo's Island has since been transplanted to a competing virtual environment.

Brands must be in tune with the Second Life culture in order to be successful. If they're seen as predators who are not one of them, they will be eaten alive.

After a *BusinessWeek* cover story about Second Life in March of 2006, seemingly every major corporation is exploring the development of a branded attraction in the popular 3-D virtual world. The only out-of-pocket cost is the price of the "land," along with the man power cost of developing a unique, vibrant and attractive virtual "home."

How can professional communicators take advantage of Second Life? By firing up their imaginations. There are few limits. If your company wants a piece of the action, you'll be well advised to work with an agency that has experience working in Second Life. Here are some options you might wish to explore.

PR and buzz

Second Life is a buzz-making machine. While two million users don't seem all that impressive in comparison to MySpace and YouTube figures, the Second Life community spends unprecedented time—hours, days and weeks—with branded attractions. They are the mavens, connectors, opinion leaders and buzz agents who will spread word about your brand that will quickly spill over to blogs and mainstream media.

Internal communication

Second Life represents an extremely promising locus of workplace learning and communication, and it's begun attracting the attention of innovative employee communication and training managers in a variety of industries. They set up Intranet Islands that are only available for their own employees. Massive multiplayer environments like Second Life give information and service workers a chance to learn the skills they need in a context that's actually *energizing*. One of the forum's greatest strengths is its "we'll pretend not to teach if you'll pretend not to learn" ethic.

Second Life is Internet in 3-D. After a few minutes in Second Life you'll find any regular web site to be just a collection of flat pages. You will have seen the future of the Internet. Companies that innovate and rewrite their playbooks for community building will be pioneering the way to a sustainable competitive advantage in this brave new world. Try it out. And if you meet Anders Wildcat, say hi.

Anders Gronstedt is president of the Gronstedt Group, which helps companies improve work place and marketing performance in both first and Second Life. He can be reached at anders@gronstedtgroup.com.

© 2007 International Association of Business Communicators.
One Hallidie Plaza, Suite 600 San Francisco, CA 94102 USA
+1 415.544.4700

[Terms of Service](#)