

Second Life: Future First Place of Business?

Just imagine the possibilities: doing business globally without having to travel at all. No more wasting of hours getting to your destination, no more "you are selected for special screening" harassment on US airports, no more bad air, bad food and cramped legs with 14 hours hops to Asia, no more traffic jams, no more missed connections, Instead only warm and comfy sitting in front of your notebook, a cup of coffee next to you and the worlds biggest market place just one keystroke away.

Today you can already virtually test-drive your new Beemer or buy a pair of sport shoes (virtual and real) in Second Life [1]. Maybe tomorrow you will be able to visit a trade show there. The products will be shown in 3D animation, including all the technical specs and the pricing that applies to your company. The salesperson has enough time for all your questions and enough expertise to answer them as well. There is no need to walk endless halls to get to the couple of vendors you want to see, there is also no need for stale coffee and standardized trade show cookies to get you through the day. In minimal time you are perfectly informed about the new products of your vendors, about some interesting new players on the market and you chatted amicably with your favourite suppliers as well as with a couple of business partners also visiting the show. – That is your avatar chatted with their avatar, which is even better since you did not shave this morning.

Nice scenario, very effective, very cost saving for your company, might be even healthy for yourself, compared.

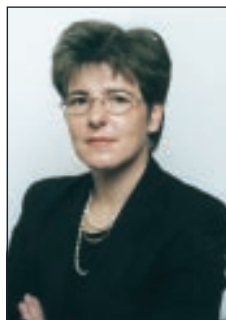
For the vendor: even better. Just imagine being able to be present at virtually all interesting trade shows worldwide, without the hassle of shipping material and people all over the world, building costly booths and getting your equipment

running without electricity in – say – Mumbai. Your products are represented always in the new version, information updated immediately, your sales force reaches spectacular peaks of efficiency and after you had issued the company-wide rules of conduct for your employees in the Internet, your CI is transported flawlessly.

It is remarkable anyway how much, in general, the avatar today resembles the actual person as opposed to being some sort of fantasy superhuman. Admittedly, there might be a tad fuller hair or a wee bit less tummy, but all in all there is a tendency to design the electronic image as a match for the physical appearance of its owner. This shows that the virtual reality is on a clear path to being used as a means of transportation more than as a fantasy game place. Still short of "Beam me up, Scotty", there is no faster way to travel than the Internet. Maybe Second Life in its form today is not yet the pinnacle of an electronic market place ready for capital goods, but the need is clearly there. This is also very visible with the increasing popularity of Internet business networks (did you know that there is an Imaging & Machine Vision group at Xing?).

So are we already on the verge of a new way to do business or is the physical personal contact irreplaceable in the foreseeable future?

As always, I am looking forward to your feedback.



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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life