

Multimedia and Internet @ Schools

Pipeline Column:

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Meet Your Kids' Avatars

Future School Libraries': A Third Presence in Second Life

Second Life: *definition* – “Second Life is an open-ended virtual world created by San Francisco-based Linden Lab. It is similar to There, another such world created around the same time, in that one of its primary focuses is socialization, but the similarity ends there. The brain child of former RealNetworks CTO Philip Rosedale, Second Life gives its users (referred to as residents) tools to shape its world.” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life)

Avatars: *definition* – “A graphical representation of a real person in cyberspace.”

Please - none of the already stale jokes that you like your *first* life just fine. Not only is it an old joke (the internet has given humour a half life of about 20 minutes) but it implies folks are putting up barriers and missing the learning moment.

So – you’ve likely heard the numbers. The most conservative estimates, as of January 2007, put Second Life as a pretty huge virtual ecology. Over 1.2 million people have created avatars in Second Life. 1,525,670 unique people have logged into Second Life at least once and of that number, 252,284 people have logged in more than 30 days after their account creation date. The conservative monthly growth rate is about 23%. 23% growth will mean 3 million in a year’s time, a healthy number, but not hyperbolic growth. It can be managed and we can see the effects and react – unlike other web-based changes we’ve lived through.

We’re in a new world where experimentation and exciting pilots are multiplying like Tribbles (non-Trekkies will just have to look this up!). Cool! Rad! Sweet! Hot! Cats Pajamas! Whatever your age, this is so engaging and interesting to a profession that thrives on being interested and making things interesting.

Check out the hundreds of Facebook, MySpace and Bebo sites for libraries, teachers, schools, and students connecting with other students, librarians and teachers. Visit the unbelievably fantastic Active Worlds library at Eastern University in Pennsylvania, seeing visual displays added to OPACs, library story time podcasts from the websites, community blogs, DDR and gaming events, Rock & Roll concert nights, and more – well – it’s just sooooo exciting. Feel the change! Library first life is heading for another new plateau while still maintaining a strong and vital first life presence – physical and virtual.

I am writing this article after returning from the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Seattle. At that event we offered live tours of the Second Life Libraries. There are over 400 librarians in Second Life now working on virtual library services on over 9 islands in Second Life. Info Island, the focal island, attracts 4000 visitors a day. Cybrary City, where the Australian Libraries Building is located, has 1000 visits per day. There are dozens of Edulands too.

Several people, including one from the library press, asked me why Second Life libraries were such an important development. One said they just didn't 'get it'. I know it's not age, because I'm getting up there and I get it. I didn't have a great answer at the time but it gave me the impetus to write this article. It's about the experience. It's about learning by doing. It's harder to get Second Life in the abstract – much like it was difficult to explain what the Web and Internet were going to be in the early days. Remember 1994 when someone tried to explain the web, gopher, Archie, html, etc. to us?

Why is Second Life Library 2.0 Important?

I always have my antennae up to sense trends in the information and library worlds. So when I see people flocking to environments and events like Second Life I sense that something significant is afoot. What can you do in Second Life?

Can you do everything a library does, including books, in Second Life? So far, and this is an incomplete A-Z list, we haven't hit a boundary that says you can't do anything in Second Life that you can do in a real physical/virtual library. These are the following things that are there, in Library 2.0 already:

- a. A Science Center
- b. An Art Gallery
- c. Book Talks
- d. Authors as visitors and as events
- e. Publishers
- f. A Mystery Castle
- g. A Science Fiction and Fantasy Collection
- h. Information Literacy and library research skills classes
- i. A huge Theater
- j. Training and education spaces
- k. A Health Information Island
- l. A Medical Library
- m. A Walk-in Book
- n. Games
- o. Search databases like PubMed
- p. TechSoup
- q. Educational courses
- r. OCLC Database trials
- s. Politicians!

- t. Programming parties
 - u. Wine and Cheese parties (yep – virtual food)
 - v. A university engineering library
 - w. Dances
 - x. Artists discussions, with books and art
 - y. Chats with fellow patrons, locally and globally
 - And even . . .
 - z. Books and magazines!
- Sounds like a library to me!*

The initial creativity seems boundless. As I take my 'noob' (newbie) self through Second Life I am feeling the same thing I felt when I put my first website up in late 1994. It's a combination of excitement, play, a sense of adventure and a burgeoning feeling that I am seeing the future again. We're, of course, not the only ones here. Dell Computer runs press conferences, Reuters has an island and even the venerable ALA Washington Office and their information maven, Jenny Levine, The Shifted Librarian, can be found there. Many of the familiar names of leading librarians can be found underneath their Second Life avatar identities. Libraries and librarians from around the world, including folks in Canada, Australia and Europe are there.

Where do I look to find out more?

Second Life (started in 2003 by Linden Labs)

<http://secondlife.com/>

Teen Second Life

<http://teen.secondlife.com/>

Info Island Blog

<http://infoisland.org/>

Eye4YouAlliance Blog

<http://eye4youalliance.youthtech.info/>

M2-Metaverse Messenger (The Second Life Newspaper)

<http://www.metaversemessenger.com/>

Second Life Library Flickr Group (See screenshots)

<http://del.icio.us/secondlifelibrary>

Second Life Library Del.icio.us links (find articles and sites)

<http://flickr.com/groups/secondlifelibrary>

Second Life Library in MySpace

<http://www.myspace.com/infoisland>

Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County
<http://plcmc.org/>

Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County Teens
<http://plcmc.org/teens/secondlife.asp>

Alliance Library System
<http://alliancelibrarysystem.com/>

You can see articles, screenshots, ideas, commentary in the above links. You can even sign up for free, build or borrow an avatar, and get into Second Life. Learn by playing! Recent *School Library Journal* and *Computers in Libraries* issues have cover stories on Second Life.

SirsiDynix is so excited about Second Life that we've taken to sponsoring a few of our clients there including the Alliance Library Systems Library 2.0 and the Alliance Library System/Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County partnership project on Second Life and Teen Second Life which is named "Eye4YouAlliance." The purpose of the Second Life Library 2.0 is to provide real library services to Second Life residents. The goal of Eye4You Alliance is to create a safe, interactive and informative space for young adults within the Teen Second Life virtual world and to collaborate with other educators who serve youth and are already present in Teen Second Life and in real life.

In January 2007, the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library entered the fray and is no longer just a one branch library. T&SCPL has opened up a new location in Cybrary City in Second Life. Jeff Dawson, youth services manager at TSCPL, said his organization recently became a part of this growing trend and now plans to use the program as a new way to reach Topeka youth. "This is so new. We're not even sure we understand all of it yet," Dawson said. "We just know we need to be here."



Caption: This screenshot shows Squid Cagney (a.k.a. Stephen Abram) taking a tour of Second Life Library 2.0 with BlueWings Hayek (Kelly Czarnecki Teen Librarian at ImaginOn Library Loft of the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County). Says Stephen, “It’s great to have hair again in my Second Life.”

Building the Teen Library in Second Life

The pilot Alliance creation world. Any teens assisting in Second Emergent Library or



Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County has started a project in partnership with the Library System to explore the of teen library services in a virtual And they’re involving their teens! (age 13-17) that are interested in with the creation of a virtual library Life will work with Matt Gullett, Technology Manager at Main Kelly Czarnecki, Teen Librarian at ImaginOn. Cool! A recent re-

organization of Second Life overall has moved the adult areas – porn, gambling, dating, etc. away from the library and education centers. Your identity allows you into certain areas and younger folks can be restricted from adult or more mature areas.

Teen Second Life is a subset of Second Life where the teen world is separate from the adult world and is only accessible to those ages 13- 17. Adults require

police checks (by the time you read this I hope that mine is complete) and it's a safer space. Every adult here shares a last name so that residents, especially teens, can identify them as adults. Over 40,000 avatars have currently been created in Teen Second Life at the start of 2007. "While many people might compare Second Life to a video game since it shares many attributes in its look and feel, there are no goals, strategies or objectives like video games; rather this online environment offers a creative playground to build, interact and learn from other users/residents. Within Second Life, users or "residents" are represented by avatars, a computer generated representation of a person." From the PLC&MC website they brainstorm a bunch of library services will be offered in Teen Second Life, such as:

- streamed in audio or video authors, politicians, or other teen-related speakers
- building, scripting, and designing classes taught by teens and adults
- book discussions
- walk-throughs of book or movie scenes
- machinima (creating videos of SL)
- book publishing
- art displays
- CosPlays - dress and act like your favorite anime or manga character
- music and drama performance
- contests
- dancing

Each library offers tours and events within their virtual presences. They have been incredibly generous with the global library community in sharing their knowledge. I am thrilled that the SirsiDynix Institute offered a session in April 2007 for a tour of Second Life Library 2.0. This has been archived as a webcast and is available as a podcast too through iTunes. You can find it here: <http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com> and view it at your leisure.

So, here we are on the cusp of a third presence for all types of libraries – we have our physical presence, we have our virtual presence as a website, and now we can have a second life in our virtual worlds.

Rev up your avatars. It's going to be a sweet ride! I look forward to meeting you in SL. My name is Squid Cagney.

Stephen Abram, MLS is Vice President, Innovation, for SirsiDynix, Chief Strategist of the SirsiDynix Institute and the President-elect of SLA. He is an SLA Fellow and the past president of the Ontario Library Association and the

immediate past president of the Canadian Library Association. Stephen would love to hear from you at stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com.