

Virtual Worlds

A virtual world, such as the FDU Game is designed to be, are interactive simulates accessed by multiple users through an online interface. Virtual worlds are also called "digital worlds," "simulated worlds" and "MMOG's."

Massively Multiplayer Online Games, also known as virtual worlds, have become increasingly popular sites for branded advertising campaigns.

While most in-game advertising efforts involve established corporations working with game administrators to deliver targeted ad campaigns or the development of separate branded worlds, players who frequent some MMOGs are taking matters into their own hands by creating original brands for avatar clothing, virtual vehicles, event hosting services and more. Although amateur virtual brand developers typically have no previous professional experience with advertising or brand building, they use conventional industry tactics such as the creation of memorable brand names, product lines, logos and promotional web sites to create and communicate complex brand identities, spending as much as 50 hours per week promoting and managing their brands.

Virtual world business brands originally developed for their creators' own entertainment have unexpectedly turned into profitable enterprises that defy stable definitions of work and play.

There are many different types of virtual worlds, however there are six features all of them have in common:

1. Shared Space: the world allows many users to participate at once.
2. Graphical User Interface: the world depicts space visually, ranging in style from 2D "cartoon" imagery to more immersive 3D environments.
3. Immediacy: interaction takes place in real time.
4. Interactivity: the world allows users to alter, develop, build, or submit customized content.
5. Persistence: the world's existence continues regardless of whether individual users are logged in.
6. Socialization/Community: the world allows and encourages the formation of in-world social groups like teams, guilds, clubs, cliques, housemates, neighborhoods, etc.

Virtual worlds have been created for many different purposes. The largest and most common type of virtual world is the "MMORPG" which stands for "Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game." But virtual worlds have also been built

for purposes other than gaming. The following section summarizes a few ways in which virtual worlds are currently used:

Commercial Gaming

Commercial gaming worlds tend to focus on a singular fictional theme and consistently follow formal conventions such as character-focused avatars, progression through an interactive narrative storyline, and a series of competitive events. Strongly influenced by fantasy, science fiction, and anime genres of literature and film, the majority of sizable virtual worlds in existence today are commercial gaming worlds. Examples include Everquest, Lineage 2, and World of Warcraft. While Virtual Worlds Review includes several top-quality gaming worlds on the review list, we mostly feature worlds that fall outside the traditional gaming mold. Fortunately there are many other great sites that contain comprehensive lists of commercial gaming worlds.

Socializing / Online Community Building

In addition to the traditional fantasy RPG worlds, there are many commercial community-focused virtual worlds that emphasize socializing rather than gaming. These worlds offer a more open-ended experience and are strongly influenced by the cultures of text-based chat rooms. Although small-scale, casual games may be incorporated into a social world, participants are not necessarily there to win or play a game, but rather to socialize with others and, in many cases, create and decorate a personal space such as a home, room, or apartment. Social worlds tend to use settings based on idealized versions of reality. Most provide some basic building tools and the ability to host activities and events that revolve around a wide variety of topics.

Education

Some virtual worlds have been created for educational purposes. In most cases, educational worlds are sponsored by academic institutions or nonprofit organizations, although some educational worlds are sponsored by corporations. Educational worlds come in a wide variety of forms, including 3D recreations of museum and gallery spaces, computer programming tutorials, virtual libraries, and meeting spaces for online university courses. Active Worlds Educational Universe is one of the oldest and largest networks of educational worlds. Adobe Atmosphere is also being used to build virtual worlds for educational purposes. A great example of a corporate-sponsored educational world is Mokitown.

Political Expression

Virtual worlds can serve as forums for political expression and debate. While real-world political issues can crop up in gaming, social, and educational worlds, there are a few cases in which completely separate virtual worlds have been built for the purpose of political debate or even experiments in various types of self-governing online communities. A great example of a virtual world with a political focus is AgoraXchange.

Military Training

Virtual world technologies are also being used in some interesting ways by the U.S. military. America's Army is being used as a tool to recruit potential soldiers, while companies like Forterra Systems are working with military groups to develop training simulations.

And this is just the beginning. As these technologies develop further over the next several years, virtual worlds will be used for all types of purposes as more people begin spending more time in them.