

'Second Life' ~ An Internet By Any Other Name

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The internet began in 1964 in a lab at MIT. It didn't become popular in mainstream for nearly 25 years. Now, the internet is a necessary part of everyday life.

During the time leading up to world wide acceptance, the internet as we know it hit a few bumps in the road.

The concept and development of technology that would serve the world must have been hard for the brilliant developers to explain to average people of the time. After years of fine tuning, a few name changes and functionality, it was presented to the world for use.

The idea was fascinating, though novice users were easily frustrated or intimidated. Businesses had to keep up with changes on stationary and business cards as their web information rapidly changed. It took a several years in practice to hammer a few things out. Opportunities on the internet became well known, but a notorious reputation of gambling, pornography and money scams were soon associated with the internet. It became clear, the internet is a world wide arena accommodating all categories. And so, to each, his own.

The same may be true for the internet sensation, Second Life. Second Life, affectionately referred to as 'SL', began at Linden Labs, San Francisco in 2003. SL takes the internet to its next level using a 3D virtual world allowing the most dynamic exchange of information, commerce and social interaction imagineable.

'Your World, Your Life' is their catch phrase. When you join, you are given an avatar in which to customize and name. You create your first name and choose from a selection of last names. Choice last names are available at a premium. Many names are silly, some are strange and others are plain - just like an email address choice. Your name and your start date are not modifiable. After your new avatar completes orientation, you set out into the world to explore, find your place.

Once you have acquired the basic skills needed to navigate in-world, you are in control of your situations, surroundings, your appearance, your virtual existence. You don't need to maintain your 'second life' any more than you do an email account. Like the internet, you may transfer to different places. Instead of going page to page on the internet, SL brings you into the scene in a 3D, fully interactive capacity. There is an in-world search engine in which to enter key words to find places, events, classifieds or people, much like the internet we use everyday. If you want to find live music, arts and culture, it's there. You can be fully entertained from your home office. Concerts, dinner theatre, live DJ's and performance arts. If you want to find romance and, well, all that goes with that, it's there.

As you may have guessed, I am enthusiastic about Second Life, but trying to explain it to friends and family that don't quite get it, is like trying to explain the possibilities of the internet to someone in 1979. It has yet to catch on, but I am certain it will.

You are what you make it. For me, a stay at home mother with a BA in Media, a website and plenty of professional experience, it is an opportunity to keep current and reaffirm my skills. I am proudly establishing myself in a new medium and most definately re-defining my career.

Always current with market trends and technology, my husband had been talking about this for sometime. He is a highly skilled multimedia professional. I watched as he created his name, his appearance and character. After a few months of his enthusiasm, I realized, he was passionate about this. He learned as much as he could whenever possible. I knew I couldn't beat 'em, so I joined him. Together, we find really wonderful places, listen to music, create and laugh, alot. It was like dating my husband all over again! We now have an art gallery, shops for rent, meeting space and a multimedia studio in second life. We are using our real life skills as media professionals. Companies and individuals come to our studio, 'Wichi Multimedia Studio' in SL, for help becoming more SL savvy. More information is available at www.AppleMacKay.com. Well known companies, universities and charities are arriving in SL everyday to stake their claim in the hottest new arena, 3D internet. NBC Universal recently did a movie release promotion for 'Smokin Aces' in SL. Sears is setting up a virtual show room of appliances and tools. Circuit City has a showroom. IBM has a recruitment center. Sony BMG has viewing rooms to see and hear top artists like Christina Aguilera and Ben Folds. The University of North Carolina has a School of Information and Library Science. Boomer Esiason is there with CBS Sports while he is raising awareness for Cystic Fibrosis. The list of participants goes on. These establishments are helping validate the integrity of Second Life for those still unsure.

Second Life has a long way to go before it is widely accepted by the everyday person. My guess is that it will take three to five years before it is common for everyone to have an avatar in this, or any other 3D world. At this stage, people are weary of the name, 'Second Life'. I've heard comments like, "I have a busy enough first life, I don't need a second life", and "it sounds like a religion or a cult". These people are taking the name, 'Second Life' too literally. It does take a while to get used to, but a 3D virtual world is without doubt, the evolution of the internet.

So, whether it's called 'Second Life', 'SL', '3D Internet' or any other name, I think that most people are just waiting for the rest of us to pave the way and test the waters. That's fine. We'll be poised and ready for them.