



Using Second Life[®] for Workplace Learning

Analysis and Resources

By Tom Werner, Director, Research and Development



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About the Author



Tom Werner is Director of Research and Development at Brandon Hall Research.

Tom has directed the Brandon Hall Excellence in Learning Awards since 2003.

He has written research reports at Brandon Hall Research about e-learning, leadership development, and linking training to the business.

Tom blogs about innovative learning practices, especially immersive learning, at <http://www.brandon-hall.com/tomwerner>.



Summary

This report analyzes the current practices of using Second Life for learning. Second Life represents an accessible and affordable means of experiencing and experimenting with virtual worlds for learning.

On the plus side, Second Life allows movement in 3-D space; 3-D demonstration and representation; the engendering empathy, rapid prototyping, and co-design; role playing; and an alternative means of online interaction.

On the down side, Second Life has a definite learning curve for basic navigation; it is not ideal for online communication and online presentations; it is heavily graphics-intensive; it faces technical and stability limitations based on its current design and strategy; it is labor-intensive in terms of developing 3-D content; and, as a hosted environment open to the public, it raises questions about security.

Experimentation with Second Life in higher education is very active. Regarding Second Life's use for workplace learning, thought leaders have described its potential enthusiastically; however, most workplace learning efforts in Second Life are in the early stages. Some intriguing early-adopter implementations and anecdotal evidence exist.

Workplace learning professionals should assume that the use of virtual worlds for learning will evolve rapidly thanks to the innovations of proprietary virtual worlds' providers, the continued experimentation in higher education, the arrival of open-source virtual world software, and the growing acceptance of immersive games among consumers.

In particular, learning departments should consider Second Life as a virtual learning environment if learning objectives involve 3-D objects, movement, and decision-making in physical situations or unique physical settings where real-life access is limited or dangerous; when the lower cost of Second Life relative to proprietary virtual worlds is important; and when instructors and learners are prepared to handle the learning curve of creating and navigating in Second Life.