

Virtual Worlds for Learning

An Analysis of Eight Immersive Environment Platforms

By Ross McKerlich

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About the Author



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Ross McKerlich is a distance education professional and an education technology enthusiast. Ross was introduced to virtual worlds in a graduate course, and has been immersed ever since in the challenge of adding this technology to the educator's tool chest.

In addition to research and writing for Brandon Hall Research, Ross owns his own consulting company called Centerboard Strategic Learning (www.centerboard.ca). Centerboard focuses on evaluating both virtual world platforms, and the quality of teaching that takes place in these environments. The latter evaluation is done using the MUVEEET – an instrument developed by Ross McKerlich and Terry Anderson.

Ross has a master's degree in distance education, a diploma in adult education and a bachelor of arts degree. He lives in Kelowna, B.C., Canada with his wife and two sons, and loves sailing and other outdoor pursuits. Ross can be contacted by e-mailing ross@centerboard.ca.

Executive Summary

When people hear the terms virtual world or immersive environment, they often think of Second Life. This isn't surprising. Recent statistics for Second life indicate that more than 6 million people have logged in at least once, and there are conservatively more than 600,000 regular Second Life users. Second Life is by far the most well known virtual world. But, you may be surprised to hear, there are others.

This report profiles eight virtual worlds to consider for workplace learning. This report also presents standards for evaluating virtual worlds, to help you select a suitable platform.



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Introduction

How do we, as corporate trainers, evaluate virtual world platforms? What makes one better than another? Is every virtual world suitable for workplace learning? These are appropriate questions because this technology is new and there are no common standards and criteria.

This report suggests general standards for evaluating virtual worlds, and profiles eight virtual worlds that are suitable for business use. A snapshot evaluation is offered on each, based on the suggested standards for evaluation.