

Newsletter

Editorial

The last 3 months have seen a lot of activity within the virtual world space. Second Life has reached almost 8m registrations. Sony has announced the Sony Home virtual world/3D chat environment to run on Playstation 3s, and the Chinese have just signed a deal with Mind Ark, makers of the Entropia SF virtual world, to create a virtual city for the inhabitants of Beijing.

The media also continues to dedicate significant column inches and airtime, including an entire edition of the BBC Money Programme and a large chunk of the Heaven and Earth religious affairs programme.

In all this there is one announcement which stands out. Gartner, respected IT analysts and home of the hype-cycle, have forecast that by 2011 80% of active Internet users (and Global 500 companies), will have a presence in at least one virtual world.

And at Daden, we plan on helping them get there!

David Burden
Managing Director

Our Newsletter is sent out two to four times a year to customers, prospects and friends of Daden Limited.

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SLBots



Go into almost any shop or office in Second Life and the chances are that apart from a few fellow visitors it will be empty. No staff, no shop assistants, not even a receptionist. A simple GreeterBot may whisper a "Hello avatar" message to you, but that's it.

Over the last few months we've been working to integrate our chatbot technology with Second Life. We used to have a chatbot running in Alpha World (another virtual world), and it seemed natural to get them running in Second Life as well. At first we used our existing Discourse based chatbots like Halo. Luckily the design of Discourse made this a relatively simple process, since we could make use of its web-services interface to simply exchange XML messages with a small scripted object in Second Life which "represented" the chatbot in the virtual world (as in the image above).

However whilst Discourse has considerable application for more sophisticated chatbots it struck us that most SL users, and even some corporates, might prefer a simpler bot – one that they could programme and manage in-world, without using the web or AIML (the Artificial Intelligence Markup Language).

And so our range of SLBots was born. For these we have developed a new back-end engine – one which can ultimately be migrated to Discourse but which makes it far easier to get a chatbot up and running. The SLBots in fact have two different ways of working. The first is to let them learn automatically. Initially the bot is programmed just to say something non-committal (like "OK"), to everything said to it. But it remembers what the users speaking to it say, and then later says the same thing to that user, or another user, and stores what the user says in response as a normal "human" response to that question or statement. Next time a user says the same thing the bot will say its "human" reply. The result is a bot that rapidly learns how to speak, with no programming whatsoever, and everything it says sounds human, if not necessarily relevant!

The problem is that the bot has no idea what it is saying, and so it will probably best resemble a drunk chatting away at the end of the bar (probably a key market in SL!). So we've added the ability to easily teach the bot specific question/answer pairs just by saying things like "learn", and then telling the bot what to learn. The result is a chatbot which you can make as open or as closed as you like, engaging your visitors in a wide-ranging, but fairly random, conversation, or just handling a few specific questions about you and your business. Either way bots like these start to make places within SL (and other virtual worlds) seem more alive and welcoming, increasing dwell time, answering questions and hopefully increasing sales.

Chat with our SLBots on Daden Prime, or on the web at <http://www.chatbots.co.uk/>.

libsecondlife – The SL API Toolkit



A LibSL controlled bot in "raw" state

In recent months we've been taking a look at libsecondlife (LibSL). This project became infamous when some of its code was misused to create the "CopyBot" a few months ago – a program which reputedly copied un-copyable objects. But in reality LibSL is a collaborative project to create a programming interface for SL. By using the LibSL library we are able to create software programmes which will let you interact with Second Life in completely new ways – and without running up the main SL client.

Some of the LibSL projects which we are working on include:

- Automatically controlled avatars driven by our Discourse and SLBot chatbot engines – visually indistinguishable from an ordinary SL user
- A simple chat application so that you can "talk" into Second Life without logging on with the Linden Lab browser – this has potential in low bandwidth/graphics situations (including mobile), and in allowing call centres to handle in-world SL enquiries
- Control systems which will let us connect real world sensors to SL objects, and SL objects to real world devices (lights, motors etc), enabling us to create mixed-reality spaces for business or art.

If you'd like information on LibSL, or any of these projects just let us know.

Latest Publications...

The following are all available from our web site (or email us for a copy):

- Virtual Worlds – A New Medium: 16pp Monograph
- Virtual Worlds – A Future Roadmap: 16pp Monograph
- Teen SL, Runescape, Disney ToonTown, and Club Penguin: – what the next generation thinks – 11 and 16 year olds review four virtual worlds aimed at young people.

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We're always keen to have a chat about life, virtual worlds, and how we can help your organisation grow.

Virtual World Watch

A brief summary of key developments around the Virtual World and synthetic environment space.

Second Life: Now up to nearly 8m registrations. Major new features released in the last months include "sculpties" - which for the first time opens up the possibility of creating SL artefacts in industry standard applications like Blender and Maya and importing them into the world – and WindLight – an atmosphere simulator which lets you create your own skies, clouds, sunsets and solar lighting effects - SL never looked so good. Voice is still in Beta but a "First Look" viewer is already available on the main grid.

Entropia: MindArk, the Swedish makers of SF themed virtual world Entropia, have signed a deal with Beijing to build a virtual city for Beijing's 7m inhabitants. This is not a virtual tourist destination, but rather intended give give Beijing's population a complete parallel cybernetic world in which to work and play.

We've also ...

- Run a major PR campaign for a leading UK car manufacturer in Second Life
- Conducted a risk assessment into a presence in Second Life on behalf of a corporate client
- Held "lunch and learn" briefings on Virtual Worlds at major PR/marketing agencies in London, Birmingham and Manchester.
- Presented at a "futures workshop" for a major research association to their members.
- Joined a European research consortium advising them on virtual spaces and AI for archive access and research.

Daden @ Events

Daden MD David Burden spoke recently at:

- 27th June – Apply Group SL Masterclass
- 28th June – Intellect SL Workshop
- 28th June – Artificial Intelligence Innovations

He is also due to speak at:

- 13th Sep – SGI Serious Games Conference
- 8th Nov – Headstar eDemocracy Conference

... and we'll be at the IQPC Second Life event on 25th-26th Sept in London

You may even have caught David and his family on the BBC 6 O'Clock News in May having their house audited by an environmental specialist!

About Us

Daden Limited is a full service virtual world development agency. We help clients understand the virtual world and synthetic environment space, and then if appropriate help them to enter the right virtual worlds to build better relationships with their clients and market place. We do this through four services: *Inform*, *Involve*, *Integrate* and *Interact*.