VIRTUAL WORLDS, NEW YORK, 2008

They say a picture paints a thousand words but a flat screen monitor can make your day!!

Imagine Soulla's (Daden's Client Director) surprise when she visited the Linden Lab stand at the Virtual Worlds Conference in New York and saw Glenn Fisher of Linden Lab (pictured) showcasing our work.

Daden are used to Lindens visiting our SL offices. We were, however, taken aback when we saw they were showcasing our Los Angeles airport integration at the conference.

The 3D integration depicts real time data of planes coming into land at the airport detailing flight number and altitude information (there is a small time delay for security).

Linden Lab were also happy to let us put copies of the April issue of Datum (you can just see one in the foreground of the picture) on the stand.

According to Glenn the newsletter was flying (pardon the pun) off the desk and people were standing around reading it too!

CONTENTS

INFORM   INVOLVE   INTEGRATE   INTERACT

VIRTUAL BIRMINGHAM - DADEN BRING GOOGLE

A few months ago Second Life introduced the ability to bring web pages into SL – although you could not interact with them.

Daden have always had an interest in GIS data in virtual worlds so it was fairly natural for us to point the media stream at a Google Maps page and see it displayed in SL. Nice, but the problem was you couldn't pan or zoom – it was just one view.

After a bit of work we created a Google Maps controller in SL, which had the zoom and pan buttons (and even the Sat/Map overlay buttons), and let you start to browse Google Maps in SL just as you would on the web – but with the added advantage that you could do it collaboratively with those around you.

Fun, but it still took ages to go to a particular place, so we used our NewsGlobe geocoder to support a "find" function which let you chat "find London" (or whatever) and have the map zoom straight to the point of interest. Even so something was still lacking.

When we used NewsGlobe to generate a Google Map showing data points from a Google Earth or RSS feed, you could see them in Second Life (as green marks on the map image), but you couldn't click on them – since the SL web page was not interactive.

A lot more work in the workshop and we cracked the problem. Now as we plotted a data feed not only did we get markers on the map image but we also had Second Life marker objects rezzed on top of the map in Second Life. If you then touched the marker you could view the related web page – either on an SL prim, or in the new built-in SL browser.

It just so happened that concurrently with this we were awarded a contract by Digital Birmingham (a part of Birmingham City Council) to create a virtual briefing hub to support the nascent Virtual Birmingham project (*http://www.digitalbirmingham.co.uk/content.php?uid=virtual*). Initially we'd intended to build this with static maps – but now we had Google Maps working it was natural to use that instead.

Our team have pulled together a great environment to support Digital Birmingham, and to show off the system and the city. At the whole earth level users can view BBC and CNN news feeds, or take part in a global "where am I" geography quiz. Zooming down into Birmingham we start overlaying websites and even photos from Flickr.

Our piece-de-resistance though is working out how to use the Google Maps images to create a pseudo-3D view of the city. Tall buildings are picked out as individual models (see picture above), and users can touch them to link to relevant web sites or, in the case of Millennium Point, our 1:1 model in Second Life.

We've also added videos, webcams, and some 360 degree panoramas, so that when you zoom into the Bullring in Birmingham (for example) you can not only stand on the map and look down, but also have the panorama displayed all around you.

There are a wide variety of ways in which the hub can now be used, For instance iCentrum (another Digital Birmingham partner) is providing us with datasets of medical facilities across the city. We also see applications around planning, infrastructure management and inward investment.

MAPS INTO SECOND LIFE

Several bloggers have already stumbled across the hub and are actively writing about it, which has increased overall traffic to our island. The team at Digital Urban (UCL's CASA - Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, University College London. loved the system so much that they even put their own video together.

Media coverage has been great – and we haven't even told the physical world press yet! We are now working with Digital Birmingham to train their staff how to use it, and then we can all begin to use it to talk to stakeholders across the city about the concept of a Virtual Birmingham.

Needless to say we've also had a lot of requests for copies of the system. We are making arrangements with two of the leading not-for-profits in SL to host copies.

If you'd like to talk to us about this technology for your city, educational establishment or organisation, then please give us a call. We are also looking at creating a simplified version for "consumer" use in SL, at SL prices.

- To visit the Virtual Birmingham Project in Second Life. http://slurl.com/second life/daden prime/227/19/399.

WHAT THE BLOGGERS ARE SAYING

- *"Every now and again work comes to your attention that makes you think 'wow' - Daden Limited have imported Google Maps into Second Life and it has just eaten up most of our morning."* **(Digital Urban)**.

- *"The latest version of Second Life's official client includes the ability to stream static web pages into the world, and to no one's surprise, the mad scientists at UK agency Daden Limited have cooked up yet another potentially transformative application for that technology: an interface for accessing, navigating in, and interacting with Google Maps.... Our video shows it in action locating Daden's Birmingham office in Google Maps, bringing up the satellite overlay, and most impressive to me, importing an RSS newsfeed from the BBC onto the map, dynamically displaying the real world location of news stories around the world. Previous mixed reality mash-ups from Daden include a Twitter fountain and a 3D air traffic feed."* **(New World Notes)**.

- *"UK virtual world consultants, Daden Limited have created an amazing build in Second Life that directly leverages Google Maps content......With multiple mirror worlds in development and work like this being done can you imagine how interesting booking a holiday is going to be in coming years? ....Thanks to Meta Linden for the heads-up."* **(Metaverse Journal)**.

- *"Geek heaven: A wiz-bang geo-coded map."* **(Not Possible IRL)**.

- *"Auf dem Daden Prime Sim gibt es eine sehr coole Integration der Google Earth API mit Second Life. Auf der Karte werden z.B. die aktuellen News der BBC, CNN und Al Jazeera gezeigt. Ein Klick auf die Pins öffnet die entsprechende Meldung."* **(Guymon SL)**
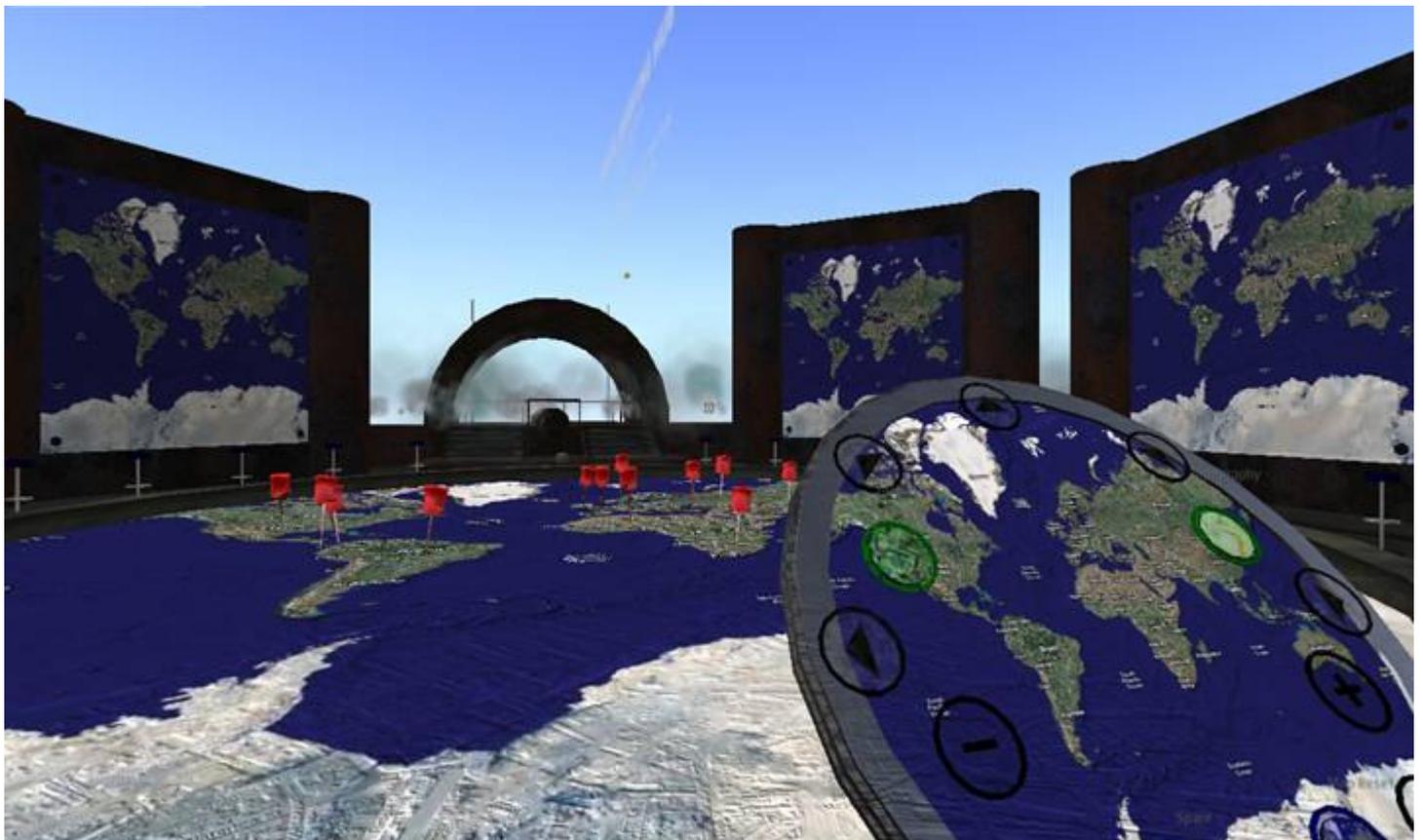
VIRTUAL BIRMINGHAM HUB

SOUTHAMPTON SOLENT UNIVERSITY LAUNCH
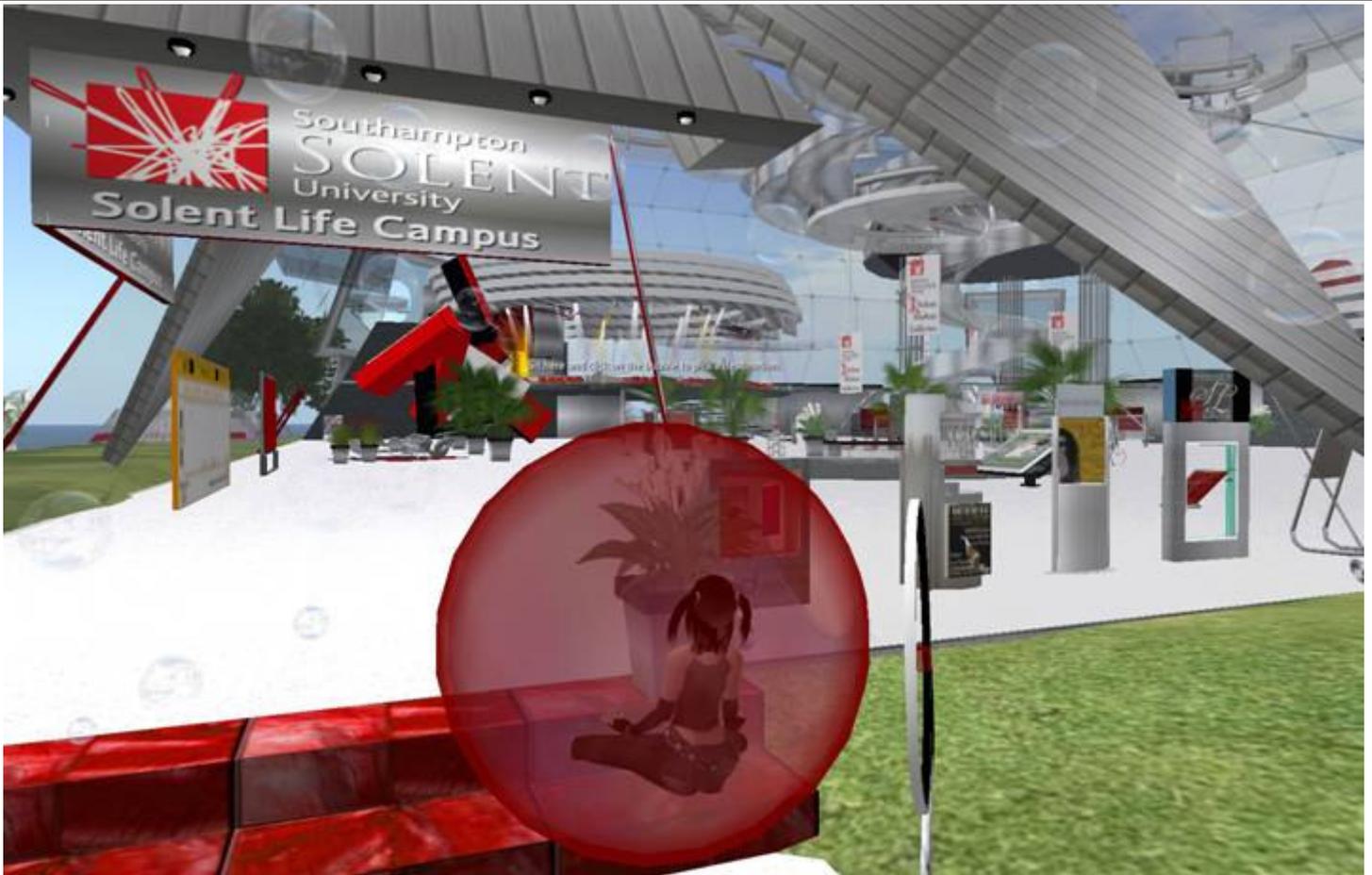
Daden have just completed a Second Life build for Southampton Solent University (SSU). The Second Life island entitled 'Solent Life' has been developed as both a teaching platform and to showcase the work of students within the creative industries.

The island has been totally conceived from mood boards and designs submitted by the University's Design School. Just as they would in real life (RL), students studying Fashion Design, Interiors & Digital Music will use the island to showcase their work as well as learning from SL/RL stylists and designers.

They will also get a taste of running a commercial business using the design studios on the island to create and concept retail environments.

Solent Life has everything required for staging a fashion show including a catwalk/stage, working lighting desk/rig and music.

In addition there is a:

- 60 seat auditorium
- Café
- Nightclub
- Audio shop for teaching music technology
- Reference library
- Gallery for art exhibitions
- Stalls where students will be able to exhibit and trade their design ideas in the future.

Solent Life is surrounded by a meandering stream with various forms of wildlife such as a kingfisher that swoops down to catch fish.

It also features a unique way of travelling around the island – by bubble. A bubble completely envelopes your avatar and rises into the air to transport you to your chosen destination.

David Burden, Managing Director of Daden Limited said. "In most instances we

THEIR CREATIVE ISLAND IN SECOND LIFE

are asked to reconstruct existing buildings. SSU though saw this as an opportunity to create an interesting and inspirational backdrop for their faculty. This lets them make full use of the opportunities offered by a virtual world."

Suzie Norris, Head of the School of Design from SSU said "We have identified opportunities to explore new teaching practice and methodologies within the virtual learning environment and embarking on developing a virtual Fashion and Lifestyle university campus within Second Life has been truly exciting.

Virtual Worlds are here to stay so the transition of these 'virtual and interactive life style trends' is providing opportunities to influence emergent perspectives on teaching methodologies where both collaborative and social learning spaces can be explored and enhance the student experience."

Lisa Mann, Academic leader, SSU, says "Collaboration with other universities and indeed companies abroad and in the UK will provide invaluable 'real life' experiences that would not normally be possible"

Solent Life Campus is a visually stunning space in Second Life and a great backdrop for any SL/RL designer wanting to hold a fashion show, explore an interior concept or mix digital music in a virtual environment.

- To visit Solent Life in Second Life teleport to http://slurl.com/secondlife/Solent%20Life/94/97/25

THINK PIECE

Dr. Jim Purbrick (Babbage Linden) of Linden Lab has a slide headed 'beware false dichotomies' when comparing Work and Fun. I'm thinking that I should use the same slogan when people start comparing Real and Virtual.

The true opposite of Virtual is not Real but Physical. We are back to the Negroponte split between the world of Atoms and the world of Bits. Our experiences in the Virtual World can be just as real as in the Physical World. We work with real money, real people, real relationships, real emotions, real time, real brands, real reputations and real risks in both spaces. And the opposite of Real?

Perhaps it's Imagined? Or Fictional? Or Unreal? Or perhaps, devoid of context, it has no opposite - everything is real in some way.

So I've started my own personal campaign to try and stop talking about the "real world" and the "virtual world", and instead talk about the "physical world", and the virtual one.

David Burden, MD, Daden

GRIMSBY TELEGRAPH INTRODUCES KATE

A virtual newsreader is the newest recruit to the web-site of the Grimsby Telegraph. Developed by Daden the talking avatar reports current news stories for newspaper's online edition.

Called "Kate", the assistant is based on "chatbot" technology created by us. Kate takes advantage of latest web-delivered text-to-speech and animated avatar technology to report on the most recent headlines and breaking news at Grimsby Telegraph's web site.

Grimsby Telegraph editor Michelle Lalor said: "We pride ourselves at being at the heart of the community and delivering news to you in innovative ways. Technology in the media industry has moved on in leaps and bounds, and now the internet is a major part of what we do.

"We have been running video reports every day now – and sometimes up to three or four videos a day – for more than a year, and breaking news 24-hours-a-day has been the norm for at least two years.

"We have done so much to it, we were left scratching our heads a little about what more we could do – and then the idea of the newsbot was born.

"They are a great example of how differently news can be reported – it's all about novelty and fun. Of course, Kate is only virtual, but we wanted to give her a personality to make her

what she effectively is – a new member of the reporting team.

"We hope you like her as much as we do!"

Journalists at the Grimsby Telegraph upload Kate with the latest news through a simple web interface designed by Daden. This lets them preview the next news bulletin before putting it live – enabling them to check pronunciation and phrasing.

David Burden, Daden's Managing Director said "Grimsby Telegraph are proactive in their use of technology and were clear with what they wanted to achieve. As a virtual newsreader Kate provides another way for people to interact with their online edition"

The technology behind Kate could also be used to dynamically capture the news from RSS feeds, engage in dialogue about the news stories being read or even drive a 3D newsreader in a virtual world such as Second Life.

Click Play for the latest from your Telegraph news reader

Play   Stop

EVENTS - WHERE YOU CAN FIND US

02/7/08	Second Life	Second Life 5th Birthday
09/7/08	Serious Games Institute	2nd Wednesday Workshop—vGovernment
11-12/9/08	Coventry	Serious Virtual Worlds 08—Crossing Boundaries
17/9/08	Birmingham	Daden are hosting a Danish and Norwegian study trip to the UK
24 - 26/9	Amsterdam	Picnic '08
6-8/10	London	Virtual Worlds Forum
20-21/10	London	Virtual Worlds London

THE PREVIEW PROJECT

The last quarter has seen our work on the PREVIEW project reach its peak as we delivered the initial systems to both of our academic partners, and they held their first testing sessions with real live students.

First off the blocks was Coventry University where we have been using our Discourse chatbot engine and the libsecondlife open-source tool to create eDrama vignettes in Second Life.

Against the backdrop of a fire at a care home the students move around the SL environment and "eavesdrop" on the conversations going on between avatars representing staff and patients.

For two other scenarios the students interact directly with the avatars, one representing a health official, and the other a care home director.

Discourse made it very easy to set up the scenarios, and we were even able to modify the scenarios mid-testing as the dramas unfolded.

We also discovered that avatar actors can be just like their physical world counterparts. During development we found them fluffing their lines and picking up on the wrong cues (creating their own play by mixing the lines from several scenes), and one avatar even walked off in a huff mid-scene (caused by her hourly "go for a walk" timer having not been disabled!).

St George's Hospital's turn came in mid-June. The Medbiquitous Virtual Patient (MVP) controller is now in its third incarnation, and makes use of the new SL web page streaming to display dynamic text and options.

We have also created a suite of around two dozen devices which interface with the controller, and a HUD slave which lets the controller be used and viewed from anywhere within the scenario.

For the patient/casualty we've found a nice mannequin in SL which we can easily position and texture as required – and by separating the sensor framework from the mannequin we can leave St George's (and other users) free to use whatever mannequin system they want. St George's have also written their first MVP case for the system we we're glad to report that it worked first time.

Throughout this project we have been convinced that the system could be used for any sort of eLearning in a virtual world (and on the web). Under the terms of the JISC contract the system will be put into the public domain — so we are keen to see how this can best be done. As we move out of development and into testing and deployment we are now actively discussing the options with St Georges and can hopefully launch a public version of the system in 4Q08.

A demo of the system is available on Daden Prime.

LINDENS IN LONDON

In May we hopped on the train (yet again!) to go down to London to meet with Glenn Linden (Glenn Fisher, [Director of Marketing Programs) and Robin Linden (Robin Harper—SVP Marketing & Community Development) from Linden Lab, who were in the UK to meet with European SL developers.

We had a useful time with them, showing them some of our work and client projects. They were particularly interested in our activates around health, education and city governance (see elsewhere this issue), and the event served to strengthen our connections back to Linden Lab. This has been most obvious in the number of Lindens we now find visiting Daden Prime. The meeting gave us the chance to get a feel for Linden Lab's strategy and Second Life's future development.

Linden certainly appear to be adopting a twin-track approach, maintaining the "public shared world" of Second Life as a consumer offering, but also increasingly enabling the development of "white label" private versions through the Second Life Grid and related open standards.

This approach to a more open but interconnected network of Second Life and related Second Life like grids is seen in recent developments like the first teleporting of an avatar from Second Life to an Open Sim grid. And if you really want to look to the future, one of the SL planning documents looks out to 2018 when there could be 2 billion users across an open grid of 60 million sims, and with 50—100 million concurrent users.

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

Virtual Worlds open up a whole new range of opportunities for educationalists, lecturers, teachers and students. Having a completely malleable digital world at your disposal offers the chance to create unique learning experiences, unhindered by the limits of real-world physics, or (to an extent) time and budgets.

From lectures on the moon or inside of a combustion engine to experiencing different cultures and time periods Virtual Worlds have the potential to change much traditional learning.

Virtual Worlds are well suited to experimental, collaborative and problem based learning.

They offer a safe environment where students can explore and make mistakes – with minimal or no repercussions. Virtual Worlds are also ideal places for informal learning, where students can learn from information embedded in the environment.

The Campus - Imaginary or Real?
Many clients initially think about recreating their whole campus in a virtual world. Whilst this can have its merits the creative opportunities of virtual worlds (and sometimes technical limitations) suggest that a more imaginary and open space approach is better. What may work best is to have a few real-world points of reference, but to leave significant space for novel environments.

The Virtual Classroom
There are at least 3 types of virtual classroom that can be created in most virtual worlds:

- A "conventional" classroom, but one whose windows open out onto a "virtual" environment matched to the lesson

- An empty classroom whose interior can be instantly changed to reflect the lesson, "holodeck" style

- An entire space which is created to provide a unique learning environment, from medieval hovel to volcano caldera.

Within a relatively small virtual space a number of flexible classrooms can be created to support a wide range of teaching activities.

Technology Integration
It makes sense to leverage an establishments existing investment in technology. Virtual worlds can make ready use of existing video, audio and PowerPoint.

They can also be integrated into Virtual Learning Environments (e.g. Moodle), and eLearning tools and standards such as SCORM and Labyrinth. Staff and students can also easily capture video, images and text chat from within the worlds to include in assignments and post to intranets, blogs, wikis or the web.

Choice of Worlds
There are now a number of virtual worlds to choose from. As well as Second Life, other virtual world options include platforms such as Forterra's Olive, QWAQ and Multiverse.

Decisions as to which to use should be based on a variety of factors including capability, security and cost. Second Life offers probably the simplest route into Virtual Worlds. With OpenSim, or Closed Islands on the Teen Grid, students can have a completely protected environment, accessible only by you, and which prohibits their moving out onto the rest of the Teen Grid or SL.

Second Life also makes it easy for staff and students to get involved in the creation and maintenance of the world, reducing costs and increasing ownership.