

Team Think

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September 8th, 2008

Are browsers the answer for the 3-D Web?

Posted by Dave Greenfield @ 4:37 am

Just got back from a camping trip in northern Israel when I saw this release announcing GoWeb3D, a new virtual world venture that will bring virtual offices, conference rooms, classrooms, exhibit halls, and retail spaces to the Web.

GoWeb3D is the latest of a string of announcements over the summer around the merging of the virtual world space with the browser. Electric Sheep Company announced WebFlock, a thin client v-world for under \$100,000. Google introduced Lively in July and then this past August, Altadyn released its next generation thin-client, 3DXplorer. GoWeb3D is using 3DXplorer as the basis of its technology.

Thin clients are game changers. As I laid out in my report on virtual worlds, today's virtual world applications aren't appropriate for the enterprise for several reasons. They take too long to install and consume too many resources on the client. They're not appropriate for the casual visitor to a web site or browser. Thin clients don't require pre-registration or complicated software downloads. As such thin clients expand the universe of potential visitors from subscribers to a specific platform to any visitor to a web site. It's sort of like the difference between a full fledged IM client used for daily communication and Java enabled applet that's initiated when for customers to chat with a sales rep at a web site.

Philip Rosedale doesn't see it that way. In an interview with TechCrunch, the SecondLife CEO dismisses the threat of browser based virtual worlds. He points out that SL has open sources its client hoping that it would be adopted as soon as possible. At the same time, he dismisses the threats of thin clients pointing out that they lack the functionality of thick clients.

But the properties that have made SecondLife so successful aren't needed by thin-clients. They're just a part of a broader push to develop photorealistic 3D worlds underlying the next generation Internet. With players like Google and Microsoft pushing the development of the rendering frameworks and cataloguing buildings, web browser-based virtual worlds won't require the rendering tools available in SecondLife. Google's 3D Warehouse, for example, provides enterprises with all of the building samples they'll need for creating a 3D world. Ironically, Google's own Lively will not be able to import buildings from 3D Warehouse; 3Dxplorer will include those buildings.

By being part of a broader eco-system, browser-based 3D clients can rely on other parties to deliver functions needed for constructing a 3D world. And for enterprises, the 102 avatar styles or realistic rippling water effect so important to gaming systems aren't nearly as important as

security, availability, accounting for regulatory compliance, and interoperability.

On this last point there's good news. While the virtual world interoperability continues to be way off, thin-clients, such as 3Dexplorer, solve the problem to some extent by allowing visitors to login with the same identity from other company's virtual worlds running on the same platform.

At the end of the day, 3D vendors will need to show their technology will improve the visitor's experience to a site if they're going to be successful beyond hobbyists or casual gamers. Certainly, the enhanced social experience becomes part of that value. Building community is important for any web site. There's also the ability to lead someone through an online experience and show them what they may want to see. The ability to have an avatar lead another through a virtual space would be helpful on this score.

See David Greenfield's full profile and disclosure of his industry affiliations.

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