

Team Think

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The 3-D Web Goes Thin

Posted by Dave Greenfield @ 12:30 pm

Increasingly, it looks like Weight Watchers has gotten hold of the Semantic Web. Fat is out. Thin is in. And while no one's counting points, it certainly looks like, thin clients will increasingly play a central roles in attracting organizations to the 3-D web.

A number of companies are enabling organizations and users to build their own virtual worlds with little more than a browser, much the way Ning, GoingOn, HiveLive, Flux, Me.com, and BricaBox has done for social networks. These instant-virtual-world companies include Vivaty, Altadyn with 3dexplorer, and to a lesser extent ScreenCaster and VastPark.

With browser only virtual worlds, organizations can engage the largest market of users today – the Web user. Even Second Life, arguably the largest virtual world with its over 13 million users, pales in comparison to the 1.1 billion that Jupiter Media estimates enjoy regular Web access.

Appealing to those users means getting rid of the fat clients needed to enter the 3-D web today. The process of downloading, installing, and configuring those clients are too complex for many users, too hefty for many business PCs, and they mean installing software on user's desktop configuration, a big no-no if that user's desktop exists in a business.

A thin client solves those problems and allows business to turn their Web sites into 3-D spaces. "We have chosen to develop our virtual headquarters and facility with an entirely web-browser based toolset," says David Elchoness, Executive Director of the Association of Virtual Worlds, "If I can get someone to 'click a link' I'll be able to show them the benefits of the 3D web. "

For consumers, Vivaty, a start-up based in Menlo Park, California, is creating 3-D virtual chat rooms that users can add to Web pages and social networking profiles. Vivaty chat rooms will rely on "a widget that you embed on other web pages. You choose the virtual furnishings for the room, and when you're on a page with the Vivaty widget, you'll — *get ready for this* — see images from the page featured as wall hangings in your virtual room..." writes Eric Elden at Venturebeat.

Three years ago Altadyn, a French firm, introduced 3dexplorer, which lets individuals do the same with their home pages. The Association of Virtual Worlds will use the Altdan technology in the building of its virtual headquarters. ScreenCaster allows users to create virtual spaces, although not interactive today, could ultimately serve as the virtual spaces of a 3-D Web similar to the way Google maps may morph into the 3-D Web. VastPark will allow anyone to deploy their own virtual world. The software still in alpha and is due to go to public Beta nextmonth.

Vivaty's uniqueness, however, and its arguably its greatest value is its integration with other social services. User can add a YouTube video or Facebook photo to their virtual world,

notes Brad Stone in his article at The New York Times.

Tying all media into a common space through a thin client will be valuable to consumers today, but organizations will ultimately find powerful as well. A single 3-D space that consolidates together marketing collateral and corporate content spread across internal and external services is a powerful tool for attracting and interacting with customers, particularly if those customers can enter into that space with just a Web browser.

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

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