



Real Learning in Virtual Worlds

Where are we and where are we headed with virtual worlds?

Gus Prestera, President
effectPerformance, Inc.



Stacie bangs her fist into the desk yet again. "I keep getting booted out of Second Life," her Skype text message says. This is her second attempt at accessing a meeting in Second Life, hosted by Dr. Anders Gronstedt of the Gronstedt Group (<http://www.gronstedtgroup.com/>). Each time, she logged on early for the meeting, then, just as it was getting started, she got bumped off. When she tried to get back in, she was notified that the meeting was closed out because it had gone over capacity. Is this the future of e-learning?

From that description, you wouldn't think so, yet e-learning professionals across the globe are excitedly chatting, texting, twittering, and blogging about Second Life and how virtual worlds will transform learning. What is it, how can e-learning professionals use it to promote learning, and where are we headed with it?

According to its creators, Linden Labs, Second Life (<http://secondlife.com/>) is a "free online virtual world imagined and created by its Residents. From the moment you enter Second Life, you'll discover a fast-growing digital world filled with people, entertainment, experiences and opportunity." In this 3D environment, you

Continued on Page 3



A border crossing simulation and an ER simulation, both in virtual worlds

Twitter Me This, Twitter Me That

What flies and tweets but won't get eaten by the cat



Mae Prestera
Executive Director



So you've heard about Twitter, how it's the hottest Web 2.0 technology since Facebook (which is now so last month); how it's becoming the new Google. But you're not sure how it works or how it could possibly apply to workplace learning and performance? Well, we're all still trying to figure it out. Let's see if I can shed a little light on this twitterific new technology.

Twitter is a free online service that enables anybody anywhere in the world to send out 140 character messages over the web, like a news wire, to anybody who might be interested enough to subscribe to their feed. Each message, called a tweet, answers the question: "What are you doing right now?" For example, if you were interested in keeping tabs on President Obama, you could subscribe to his feed, as over half a million people have done. As Twitter co-founder Biz Stone put it: "We envisioned being able to, at a glance, see what friends and colleagues were doing. We wanted it

to be a freeing way of communicating."

Whereas with an email, you, the sender, need to direct your message to specific individuals, with Twitter, your messages are pushed out to many people simultaneously. Gus, for example, set up a Twitter account the other day. As you can see in the screen capture (on page 4), he signed up to follow Elliott Masie, Barack Obama, and Time's newswire service. He can also sign up to follow the twitterambings (just made up the word) of any friends or colleagues who have Twitter accounts. Gus can log onto the site anytime and see the latest tweets from all of these sources.

Twitter also works with mobile devices, pushing tweets out to you as text messages. You, in turn, can post a tweet through your mobile device as well, which makes twittering an anytime, anywhere activity. You can now also attach pictures and audio

Continued on Page 2

In This Issue:

- ◆ Real Learning in Virtual Worlds..... 1
- ◆ Twitter Me This, Twitter Me That..... 1
- ◆ News from our sister company 2
- ◆ Coaching for Performance 3



**News from
our sister
company...**



Over the past few months, Colleen and Gus have met with dozens of training managers up and down the northeast corridor. They pretty much know the menu in the Amtrak café car by heart now.

The reaction from managers has been very positive. They recognize the unique value that Bevenour Prestera brings to the table; namely, our ability to design an entire curriculum, not just one course, to customize our off-the-shelf content to suit a client's needs, to develop blended solutions, to manage the implementation of both classroom and online curriculum elements—basically, to offer clients the opportunity to build an integrated, customized curriculum through a single vendor, rather than a disjointed collection of off-the-shelf programs offered by multiple one-trick-pony vendors. As one training manager just last week said, "...that's something unique that nobody else is doing—nobody."

In March, Bevenour Prestera released its Course Catalog, containing descriptions for 30 programs that are ready-to-be-customized and delivered immediately. Of particular relevance to today's training managers are the new programs on survivorship, leading in times of change, and generational strategies. More programs are on the way. Visit the Bevenour Prestera web site to download the Course Catalog and to get additional details about what we're up to these days.

www.bevenourprestera.com



Twitter Me This...

Continued from Page 1

clips. Soon, I imagine, you'll be able to add video from your mobile device. You could follow a war correspondent, an investigative reporter, or a mountain climber who is scaling Mount Everest, twittering away, giving you a sense of what it's like to be there, in the moment. That's one of the appeals of Twitter, that sense of being connected to people and following what they're doing, what they're thinking throughout the day. It's like an intravenous line of information about your favorite people.

But this isn't just a tool for keeping tabs on friends. Last Saturday, Comcast's email service went down, but 14,000 subscribers were able to get regular updates via Twitter. This is an example of how Twitter is being adopted by corporate communications people to keep in touch with customers and stay out ahead of crises and breaking news.

The need for connectedness and updates aside, Twitter also taps into our society's growing narcissism. While many of us feel like, 'Why would anyone want to know what I think? Who am I?', others seem to feel as if everyone should be interested in their every thought. They share every detail about their daily lives. Some of my friends do this through Twitter and Facebook. Others use blogs, discussion boards, and chat rooms. There is clearly this need to be heard. On the flip side, there is also a voyeuristic appeal to technologies like Twitter. After all, people are out there reading the tweets.

Continued from Page 4



**Blended Learning Strategy
Workshop**

When?

Thursday, May 21, 2009
6:00 to 8:00 PM

Where?

ASTD e-Learning SIG, LaSalle University
Metroplex Campus, Plymouth Meeting



What's it about?

In this session, you and your peers will design a blended program for your organization. I'll provide you with a program topic, so we're all working with the same content, but you'll each need to consider your own organization's culture, technology capabilities, audience characteristics, and performance context. As we discuss our different designs, we'll talk about alternative approaches, technologies, and ideas that you might consider. Basically, this is a hands-on workshop for anyone who wants to learn the mechanics of designing a blended learning strategy.

For more information or to register, visit:
<http://www.astdphl.org/>



When?

Thursday, May 14, 2009 at 10:15

Where?

This is part of the e-Learning Guild's
Online Forum

*To SME or Not to SME: Tips for Working with
your Customer and your Team*

For more information or to register, visit:
<http://www.elearningguild.com>

**Managing the
Unmanageable SME**



What's it about?

In this session, Stacie and Gus will explore typical characteristics of manageable and unmanageable SMEs, techniques for finding the right SME, and best practices for SME management.

...Virtual Worlds

Continued from Page 1

(through your avatar) interact with people through audio (VOIP) and chat technologies.

There are other virtual world platforms, some of which might be more appropriate for business uses. Examples include Forterra's OLIVE (<http://www.forterrainc.com/>) Proton Media's Protosphere (<http://www.protonmedia.com/>), Nortel's web.alive (<http://products.nortel.com/>) and Active Worlds (<http://www.activeworlds.com/>).

I contacted Dr. Gronstedt to ask about the learning strategies one might employ within a virtual environment.

He wrote, "...the areas of instructional design where there is overwhelming evidence that virtual worlds not only beats any other distance learning, but in fact is equal or BETTER than live training, it's in role playing. [One study] shows how border control agents role playing in Second Life in 2008 out performed students who did the same role playing in a class room in 2007 [86% to 58% in an interviewing skills assessment]. [Another study] refers to emergency response training which was proven to be as effective in virtual world as in real world, at a fraction of the cost. These are comparative studies, apple to apple, comparing live role play with virtual world role play. IBM reports similar results from their negation role plays in Second Life."

What other strategies besides simulations are currently being explored? Dr. Gronstedt wrote that "...speed mentoring, data visualization, product visualization...." are all strategies currently being used in virtual worlds.

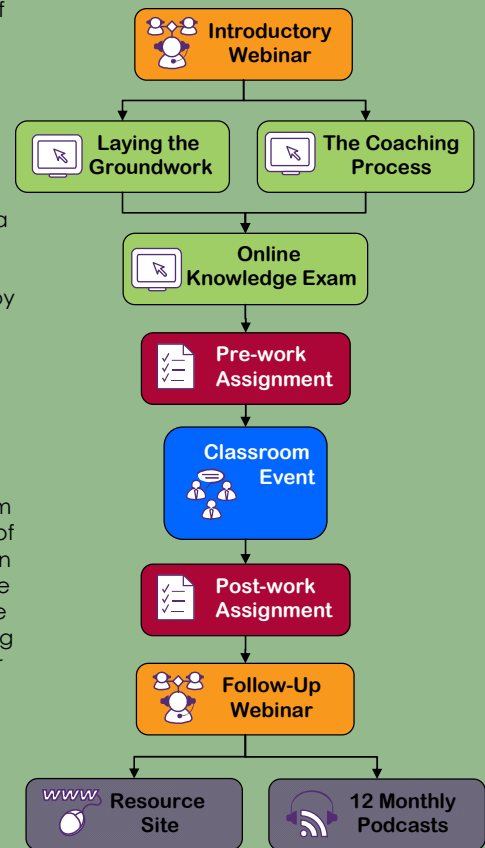
Second Life is still primarily a consumer venue. Though some early adopter organizations are trying it out, most are getting their virtual feet wet conducting meetings and conferences. Virtualis Center is a Second Life meeting planner (<http://www.virtualiscenter.com/>) that helps companies organize events, much like a real-world planner does.

One of the concerns that corporate training managers have about Second Life is that it's in the public domain, where anyone can access it and where there is little security. Slowly but surely, companies are making the investment to install virtual world platforms on their own servers, behind their own firewalls, where they can monitor and protect their content.

Another option is hosting a virtual meeting or training session in a third-party provider's firewall-protected island. Qwak (<http://www.qwak.com>) uses a software-as-a-service model to make it easy to get started.

Coaching for Performance Course

We are putting the finishing touches on the blended version of the Coaching for Performance program. Working with our sister company, Bevenour Prester and Associates, eP designers **Alicia Pfaff**, **Stacie Comolli**, and **Noelle Archambeau** and eP developers **Allan Kobernick**, **Belen Bilgic-Schneider**, and **Jeff McCary** built a series of online learning components. By doing so, they were able to cut classroom time by 50%. The blended program includes two webinars, two courseware modules, an online test, on-the-job assignments, 12 podcasts, a resource site, and a playbook that guides the learner through the process. The online components enable the classroom instructor to use the vast majority of the face-to-face time for hands-on practice activities that incorporate real-life cases and simulations. We are now in the process of adapting and customizing the Coaching for Performance course to several clients who are interested in delivering the program to their managers. If you're interested in learning more, contact us at: info@effectperformance.com or visit the Bevenour Prester site for more additional program details: www.bevenourprester.com.



Dr. Gronstedt alluded to several developments in this area: "Second Life is now being offered as a behind the firewall solution at extremely affordable rates. The other is that IBM is now offering the open-source version of Second Life, OpenSim (<http://opensimulator.org>), as an extension of its Samesite instant messaging system. There will be more annulments to follow which will make virtual worlds mainstream behind the corporate firewall."

In a report called *Using Second Life for Workplace Learning*, Brandon Hall researcher, Tom Werner, summarizes the benefits of virtual worlds this way:

"On the plus side, Second Life allows movement in 3-D space; 3-D demonstration and representation; the engendering empathy, rapid prototyping, and co-design; role playing; and an alternative means of online interaction.

"On the down side, Second Life has a definite learning curve for basic navigation; it is not ideal for basic communication and online presentations; it is heavily graphics-intensive; it faces technical and stability limitations based on its current design and strategy; it is labor-intensive in terms of developing 3-D content; and, as a hosted environment open to the public, it raises questions about security."

Even so, Mr. Werner concedes that "...the use of virtual worlds for learning will evolve rapidly...."

For a more complete listing of virtual world platforms, visit <http://cleverzebra.com/virtual-worlds>.

If you would like to explore the possibilities of using virtual worlds in your organization, contact me (gus@effectperformance.com).

Twitter Me This...

Continued from Page 2

Whether it's grandparents using Twitter to keep tabs on their grandkids; farmers using it to consult other farmers about the prevailing price of wheat, corn, and soya; or corporate employees following the tweets of their senior managers who are embroiled in a battle to keep their company going, Twitter is fast becoming a major social phenomenon. It's at the intersection where narcissism meets voyeurism, meets social networking, meets interconnectedness, meets convenience.

So what does Twitter have to do with learning and performance? Increasingly, our colleagues are asking the same question.

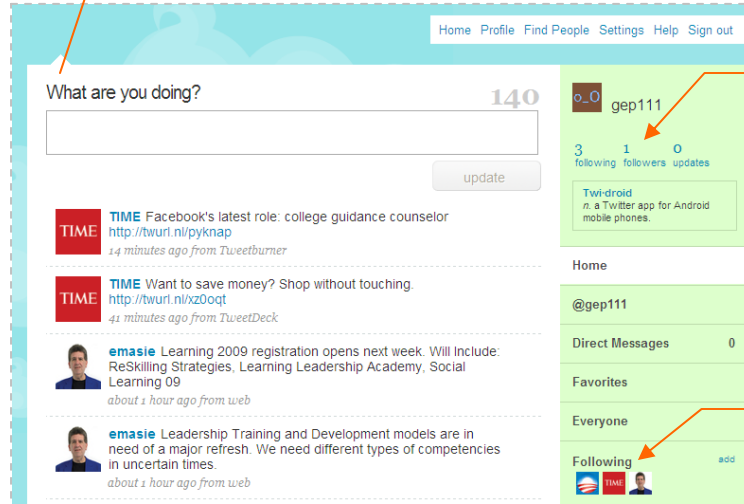
Because of it's ability to distribute information rapidly across a wide network of people to virtually any mobile device or computer, Twitter is a naturally effective tool for awareness-level training and updates. Are your developers preparing a new software release? Perhaps they could Twitter about the new features to users who have already taken the basic training but need to keep up-to-date on new developments. Going through a merger? Perhaps, your senior managers could Twitter about the things they're doing to ensure a successful merger.

New uses for Twitter are emerging. Getting subject matter experts to attend a training program can be challenging. Perhaps you could ask a set of SMEs to Twitter about their experiences, so that your trainees could follow their experiences. Instead of a day in the life experience, the trainee could get a sense of what a typical week in the life of a SME is like. Want your top sales people to

What are you doing?

One hundred and forty characters...not really that much when you are counting all of the spaces, punctuation, etc. This is 140 on the nose.

update



Your Twitter popularity scorecard—your number of followers



This shows what tweets Gus follows

share their best practices? What better way than having them Twitter ideas to each other from their PDAs while they're on the road (hopefully, not while driving)?

How about a Twitter game? Mr. Stone describes a group of Twitter users who, "played a War of the Worlds type of game. Somebody started it, saying, 'Space ships are landing outside my house,' and it turned into this massive pickup game."

What else might we do with it? As the technology expands, Twitter will expand its search and filtering capabilities, enable groups to form (as in Facebook), and make

stronger connections with Facebook and other social networking platforms. The search feature alone should be make it a great tool for researching quotes and other first-hand data.

Read the full Computer World interview with Biz Stone at:

<http://www.computerworld.com/action/article.do?command=viewArticleBasic&articleId=335679>



In this issue of



- Virtual Worlds (Second Life)
- Twitter as a Learning Tool
- News from our sister company
- Coaching for Performance Course, a blended program



effectPerformance



9 Annesley Drive
Glen Mills, PA 19342-1355