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Visual Worlds Profile #1

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Virtual Worlds

Virtual worlds are online communities where individuals are able to freely interact in a custom-built, stimulated world. Individuals are able to communicate through text and avatars. Avatar will be either two dimensional or three, which allows strong role playing presence, which is a big part of virtual worlds. The purpose of virtual worlds is mainly for entertainment, social, and even to educate. Most recently, Harvard University has led the way to educational research related to virtual worlds. Which are the two genres of virtual worlds. Games like *The Sims,* and *Second Life* are more social-oriented, while *World of Warcraft* and *EverQuest* learns towards game-oriented, but both genres fall under the category of virtual worlds.

The development of virtual reality dates back to around the 1970s. It was a slow development those first few decades, but during that last 10 years, the popularity of virtual world games has increased, leading it to be what it is today. It came in three generations of virtual worlds. The first generation being primarily text-based and small in scale, and set in a realm of fantasy adventure. The second generation came the growth of graphics, and larger scale systems, and also the introduction of social-oriented worlds. Lastly, the third, which is the current, massive systems, 3D worlds and growing genres.

The first phase of development of virtual worlds, dates to back to 1979, it was known was MUDs, a multi-user-dungeon, it was arguably the first virtual world. The first MUDs were text-based, and any communication or interactions took place without any graphics. With MUDs, players had to type commands to move along “/walk north” or “/open.” It is often associated with Dungeons & Dragons fantasy game. The contribution this game had on al virtual worlds, is that it shoed users could share space, interact and work together towards a common goal.

The second development of virtual worlds came, it started in 1985 with the release of *Habitat*. This development was critical to the rapid growth that we will later see in the third generation. Then other virtual worlds came later; *TinyMUD*, *TinyMUCK* and *Meridian59*. *Habitat* was released in 1985 and it was the first world to have avatars. It supported more than 20,000 users. In 1989, *TinyMUD* was released. It was one of the first worlds that focused more on the social aspects rather than combat. This created a new genre of virtual world.

After *TinyMUD,* came *TinyMUCK,* which was released in 1990. This allowed you to create objects within the virtual world. Later, MOO was created. This was a MUD Objection Oriented provided a scripting language that allowed users to create objects in the virtual world. The development of MOO, allowed users to interact with items other users created. For example, if one user created a city street, shops, other users would be able to see it. This game TinyMUCK, promoted a new genre of virtual worlds. A game for social interaction.

The next phase of development came in the form of MMORPGs. This stands for Massively Multiplayers Online Role Playing Game. This new type of world allowed players to enter a graphical world, where you could interact with others while role-playing characters all while attempting to accomplish goals. Virtual worlds have always been popular among individuals. *Ultima Online,* the first 3-D MMORPG was packages and sold in retail stores, but a $9.99 subscription fee was required to play the game online. Within the first three months, *Ultima Online* had 50,000 subscribers and over 100,000 within the year, all playing the subscription fee of $9.99. This game had a major impact for virtual worlds, this also became a model for all future virtual worlds because of the fact that people paid a monthly subscription fee to play.

EverQuest is a MMORPG that has many similar features to Ultima Online. Although they are similar in model, what set EverQuest apart from Ultima Online was this world required players to team up, and play together to succeed. The social interaction within the game carried on outside of the game through online discussion forums and eventually face-to- face conventions.

Second Life was launched in 2003, it is one of the most well known social-oriented virtual world. In this game, users are creating replications of real-world buildings and are able to sell and exchange items. This game wasn’t the most popular, but it is popular for educators wishing to establish virtual world presence.

The development of avatars for players to become is one of the most important roles in computer video games. In a virtual world, you pick the avatar that will represent you. Players create a digital identity with the help of text, audio and visuals. This allows users to freely express themselves. Compared to when games didn’t have any avatars, this is a component of video games that connects a player to their avatar. Having an avatar is effective in game communication and activity as the player will feel a connection with their avatar. Some people like to create a mirror image of themselves, sometimes a better version. The game Second Life, allows players to create avatars, and it is one of the most well known social-oriented virtual world.

Clearly, the development of technology has evolved tremendously. The first development of this technology was a computer program that looked like a JavaScript. There were no graphics or social aspect. Slowly, it has evolved into what we know today when we play our favorite games. There is a social impact virtual worlds play in our lives. Almost everyone who has taken part in virtual realities, has made friends through them. Individuals can spend hours playing the same game because of the want to move along with the programmed storyline.

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