



Developing New Learning And Collaboration Environments For Educators: The New Media Consortium (NMC) In Second Life



“I think it’s safe to say now that nearly every college and university has some project in Second Life.” - Larry Johnson, CEO, The NMC



Executive Summary:

“In a live videoconference, I could make a gesture and you’d see that, but we’re still not together. We’re not affecting each other’s space. In Second Life, we...experience things together.”

—Larry Johnson, CEO, The NMC

The New Media Consortium (NMC), a non-profit consortium of learning-focused organizations founded in 1993, has nearly 300 members, including most of the top colleges and universities in the world, museums, research centers, foundations, and other forward-thinking organizations. Since 2006 the NMC has used Second Life as another medium to achieve their mission - to encourage the use of emerging technologies in support of teaching, learning, research, and creative expression – with remarkable results. By helping more than 150 colleges and universities learn to make broad use of virtual spaces, including institutions like MIT, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, USC, Rice, and many others, the NMC has built the largest educational project in any virtual world. The NMC’s not-for-profit project has recovered all its costs through virtual world operations and became completely self-sustaining in early 2007.



Second Life Enhances the NMC's Visionary Pursuit of Innovation and Creativity

The NMC was founded on a deep commitment to exploring and embracing new collaboration and learning technologies. By 2005, virtual worlds had caught their attention.



The NMC Experience in Second Life, By the Numbers

- 1,500 unique visitors a week hit the NMC virtual campus.
- In a 100-day period in 2008, 15,518 visitors from 56 countries visited the NMC's virtual campus for an average of 98 minutes each.
- 11,000+ educators & students have been oriented into Second Life by the NMC since 2007.
- As of March 2009, a collection of nearly 100 Second Life regions have been developed by NMC members

Larry Johnson, CEO of the New Media Consortium, and his team instinctively understood that virtual environments free users from physical constraints while fostering meaningful interaction and collaboration. They began to search for a platform to serve as the NMC's virtual world hub, and in 2006 they chose Second Life. The NMC then created a new services unit — NMC Virtual Worlds — to spearhead their work creating virtual campuses and learning spaces for their clientele of educational institutions and NMC member organizations. Their collective work in Second Life is called the NMC Campus Project.

Lev Gonick, the former Board Chair of the NMC, also serves as the CIO of Case Western Reserve University. Gonick was one of the original NMC Campus Project partners. "The NMC's

business model for virtual worlds is consistent with the mission to spark innovation and creativity," Gonick said. "Second Life is an invitation to explore, create community, and advance common interests and purpose. This is also the core mission of most universities and colleges. The NMC Campus Project is one of the most exciting undertakings ever made by the NMC in its 15-year history."

The NMC Conference Center is a Hub of Activity

The NMC campus in Second Life was originally built to provide NMC members a place to experiment in virtual space, but quickly became a conference center venue for virtual conversations, such as the MacArthur Foundation series on Digital Media and Learning and the IBM Global Innovation Jam. The original design has since evolved into a full campus with dozens of thoughtfully designed virtual facilities for meetings and learning interaction. There is a library, a fine art museum, a conference center, an orientation island, an island-sized open-content object repository and much more. Over a 100-day period in 2008, 15,518 visitors from 56 countries visited the NMC's virtual campus for an average of 98 minutes each.

The NMC's two full-time developers, Christopher Holden and Beth Sachtjen, keep the project moving forward with the assistance of other NMC staff. They



not only help create member spaces, they also provide best practices and training. With a vibrant roster of live events, a wealth of content from the NMC's robust online libraries (including 7,000 periodicals and research databases), and outlets for experimentation, the NMC now attracts nearly 1,500 unique visitors each week to its Second Life campus. This is testimony to the fact that the NMC does not just create learning environments—they help clients build communities.



such as the University of Helsinki and The Open University. Museums and not-for-profit organizations add to the NMC's multi-disciplinary mix of global members and clients.

From 2007 to date, the NMC has oriented a remarkable 11,000+ educators and students in Second Life.

Supporting a Global Virtual World Learning Community

In conjunction with the shared spaces provided by the NMC, many member organizations have created their own unique campuses that are an essential part of the NMC Campus project. In fact, at the time of this writing nearly 100 Second Life regions have been developed by NMC members. The list of Universities on the NMC's membership roster with campuses in Second Life includes Princeton, Yale, the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business, Ball State, New York University, Pennsylvania State University, and international members



These new Residents use Second Life for a wide variety of collaboration and innovation initiatives. For example, there's a simulation curriculum and



Links

- Complete details on using the campus are available on the NMC Campus Wiki, (http://sl.nmc.org/wiki/Index.php/Main_Page).
- To learn more about educators in Second Life, the NMC conducts a yearly survey and shares the results under a Creative Commons license (<http://www.nmc.org/surveys>).
- NMC's entire history and ongoing activities are documented at the NMC Campus Observer (<http://sl.nmc.org/>) and the NMC Campus Wiki (<http://sl.nmc.org/wiki>).

environment for dental and medical students to help them prepare for situations they will eventually face in the physical world. Virtual science labs and art studios have been created. Students across the globe can visit virtual campuses and are provided educational opportunities to attend seminars, lectures, or symposia without having to travel.

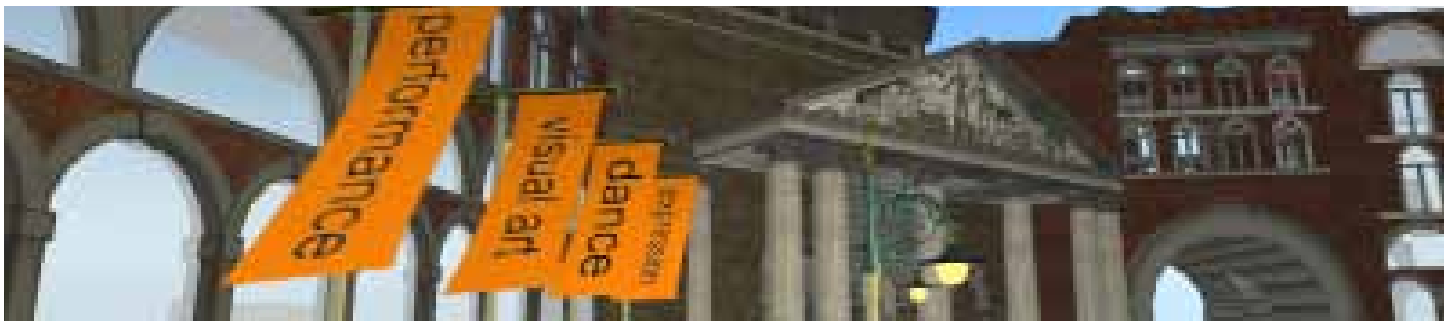
Encouraging & Sharing Best Practices for Quality Interactive Spaces

To document the goings-on within their virtual campus and further connect its members, the NMC publishes the NMC Campus Observer, a rich online resource of news including research, links, and videos about their growing inworld community. Educators such as Dr. Cynthia Calongne of Colorado Technical University save time and money reading

in Second Life. "Aside from research and conferences," Calongne says, "the NMC provides technological solutions, creates new communities for institutions and helps to identify what is needed in the future. They also help each educator, instructional designer and student to create their own content, demystifying how a school can provide quality, immersive educational experiences with limited resources."

The NMC continues to focus its efforts on stimulating learning space development in Second Life with at-cost and pro bono work. In early 2008, the NMC offered \$100,000 in Virtual Learning Prizes. The content suggested within each proposal was then built by NMC and released as open content.

Furthermore, the NMC holds a semiannual two-day Series of Virtual



tips and tricks about working and learning in the virtual world as compiled by the NMC and its members. In turn, they become inworld educators, too.

Dr. Calongne has taught over a dozen university classes and over 40 conference presentations and seminars on research and education

Symposia where attendees build community, explore new educational tools, project mashups, and other innovative teaching practices and topics. "We did a lot of research on how to bring people into Second Life," said Johnson, "and how to convene a group of people...because that's what we do." Symposia Series participants

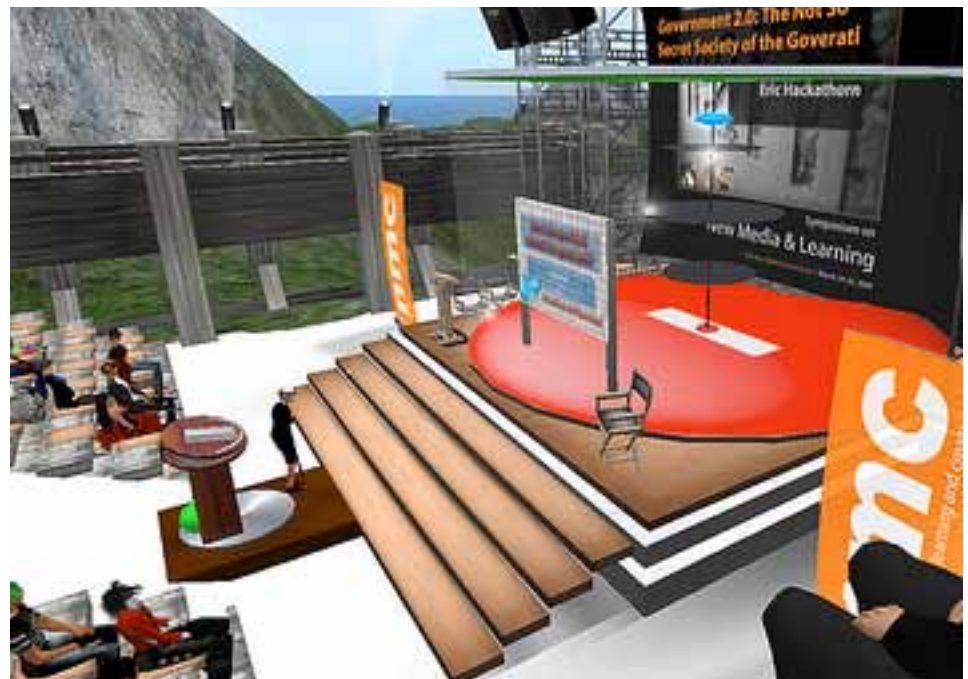


“At the NMC, we see Second Life as the most currently evolved of the virtual world platforms today, and wherever this technology takes us, Second Life will be seen as the seminal first instance of what the 3D web might look like. “
Larry Johnson, CEO, The NMC, testifying before the US Congress, April 2008

save budget, travel time, and avoid jet lag by networking with colleagues in a richly interactive environment. While the first event was free, attendance fees from subsequent symposia have allowed the self-sustaining NMC to continually deliver sophisticated educational design, architecture and development services at cost.

The Educational Technology of the Future is Virtual Worlds

Johnson summed up his experience in Second Life and said, “I think it’s safe to say now that nearly every college and university has some project in Second Life.” The NMC will undoubtedly continue to play a leading role supporting and encouraging learning institutions to find their own way into the virtual world.





About the New Media Consortium:

The New Media Consortium (NMC) is an international 501(c)3 not-for-profit consortium of nearly 300 learning-focused member organizations dedicated to the exploration and use of new media and new technologies. Through its many projects, its comprehensive website, and its series of international conferences, the NMC stimulates dialogue and understanding through the exploration of promising ideas, technologies, and applications. For more information on the NMC, see www.nmc.org.

The NMC's Emerging Technologies Initiative focuses on expanding the boundaries of teaching, learning, and creative expression by creatively applying new tools in new contexts. The centerpiece of this initiative, the Horizon Project, charts the landscape of emerging technologies and produces the NMC's annual Horizon Report. For more information on the NMC's Emerging Technologies Initiative, see www.nmc.org/horizon.

About Second Life and Linden Lab

Developed and launched by Linden Lab in 2003, Second Life is the world's leading 3D virtual world environment. It enables its users – known as Residents – to create content, interact with others, launch businesses, collaborate and educate. With a thriving inworld economy that saw over US\$360 million in user-to-user transactions in 2008, and a broad user base that includes everyone from consumers and educators to medical researchers and large enterprises, Second Life has become one of the largest hubs of user-generated content (UGC) in the world.

Linden Lab, founded in 1999 by Chairman of the Board Philip Rosedale and headquartered in San Francisco, develops revolutionary, immersive technologies that change the way people communicate, interact, learn and create. Privately held and profitable, Linden Lab is led by CEO Mark Kingdon, and has more than 300 employees across the U.S., Europe, and Asia.

Linden Lab

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