AVATAR PARK

an episodic web zone

CONTACT
Jon Samsel
7840 E.Ring Street
Long Beach, CA 90808
562-493-2330
samsel@gte.net

Avatar Park

What happens to your avatar when you log off the Net?

Is it living, breathing, interacting with your friends?

Pretending to be you?

Wanna see?

CONCEPT

What unearthly mystery lurks beneath your computer screen, hidden away from the physical world? Perhaps electronic inhabitants born from human technology, trapped in mind-bending environments with no way out. And what will happen to those who dare to intrude on this strange and foreboding world? This is the challenge facing players of Avatar Park, an episodic web site for humans of all ages.

For the first time, the avatar-enhanced chat rooms that are becoming so popular on the World Wide Web can now be explored "behind-the-scenes" from an avatar's point-of-view. What are avatars? Avatars are more than graphic, on-screen representations of human players. Avatars are alive. Most humans don't realize that once they log off from their favorite chat room, their avatars roam the electronic frontier— heck, they eat, sleep, talk, fight, love, and play— free from human interference.

"Teachers open the door,
but you must enter by yourself."
Chinese Proverb

Now it is your turn to witness those pesky electronic icons in action. As players, it will be your mission to aid a group of avatars in one or more weekly "missions." Of course, you may wish to simply explore the avatar world at your own pace or even eavesdrop on an avatar family squabble, with no specific goal other than to be entertained.

Naturally, a player cannot enter Avatar Park as a human (the darn bandwidth is too small). After downloading your Avatar Player Plug-In, you will be able to enter the private world of Avatar Park. Your role will be to assist the inhabitants of Avatar Park by solving a host of rascally riddles and head-scratching puzzles to advance the story. The story of the week will unfold piece-by-piece, unraveling the mystery that confronts you.

In addition to a weekly storyline, the player/user may pause in one of several funzones— exploratory environments which enhance the Avatar Park experience, but don't necessarily advance the episode.

One of the unique aspects of Avatar Park is the ensemble cast of wacky and bizarre characters which inhabit the world inside our computer networks. The online series begins with seven core characters, with additional freaks making guest appearances throughout the season (celebrities will lend their voice over talent to guest avatars–– think The Simpsons). Each ensemble character has his/her own unique traits which makes them stand out in a crowd. Series regulars include:

RAM (Random Access Mary) - This avatar really gets around

Interfaceless - The tall, dark and mysterious avatar

ftp (Frank Todd Protocol) - He's the avatar with a wedgie up his...

Pixel Peg - Pippy Longstocking's bad seed

Icon Bob - A gun-totin', cattle ropin' Texas conservative

Silicon Valley Girl - Sports grape lip gloss and a rich daddy

Synthespian - A natural-born geek of an actor

Susie SysOp - This tech-girl is handy with power tools

PLAY LIFE:
Amount of time a typical user will interact with an application or experience.

SAMPLE EPISODE

In this humorous episode, we find ourselves in a navigable, 3D panorama of state-of-the-art photographs from a early American artist (secured from a stock house sponsoring the episode). ftp is here, bitching and complaining about being stuck in this unGodly place–– Avatar Park. Apparently, he has been searching for a way out into the world of the humans to no avail.

As ftp drones on, Synthespian works the crowd doing what he does best, poking fun at several well-known humans (Bill Gates, OJ, Bob Dole). He gets into a tussle with Icon Bob, which is immediately broken up by Susie SysOp.

Suddenly, Interfaceless appears and stuns anxious avatars with his words, "I know the way to BigWorld. Follow me." As the gang heads down a secret passageway, they encounter you–– the user/player. Disguised as a misfit avatar, our gang pokes fun at your crude lack of graphics and poor Park manners. After a few moments of casual harassment, the avatars leave you alone. You follow the gang through a maze of circuits and wires, and assist them when you can.
During the journey, you witness a fight, help solve some puzzles, even witness a romantic rendezvous between two amorous avatars.

In the end, the avatars never do find their way out of Avatar Park. But nobody seems to mind too much. You helped the avatars discover some ancient avatar treasures for their history museum and the sojourn itself was a blast for all.

SIMULATION:
A representation or emulation of a real-world activity or event.

Construction Zone - Build your own avatar from bits and pieces of material provided. Post your cool avatar for the world to see. Add your original artwork to the ever-growing Avatar Archive.

Bio Zone - Get inside the head of your favorite avatar. Read their secret journal entries, discover clues that may assist you in your gaming efforts, browse through hundreds of photos and 3D graphics of your avatar buddies.

Game Zone - Take a breather by playing a host of Shockwave-enhanced twitch games revolving around the action and characters of Avatar Park.

History Zone - Take a virtual tour and learn about the ancient history of the Avatars in this fun environment where characters and objects come alive with the click of a mouse. Hear streaming music and sound clips, download animations, etc.

INTERACTION:

The active participation and involvement of a user in directing their movement in an application by making choices, answering questions, or controlling elements of a program.

Chat Zone - This is where Avatars and humans interact in real time chat sessions. One section of the Chat Zone allows humans access to the private chat rooms of the avatars as they gossip and rebel against their humans masters. Another section of the Chat Zone is a communications network for the humans who have entered Avatar Park. Humans can send email, form private discussion groups, and even send secret files to one another.

Multi-Player Zone - A meeting place for human gamers to meet fellow gamers, form gaming groups, and commence multi-player gaming adventures.

Artifact Zone - This is where you get to shop for your favorite Avatar Park merchandise such as t-shirts, caps, buttons, hint books, posters, etc. And don't fret–– all merchandise can be shipped to BigWorld for a nominal fee.

THE MARKETING CAVEAT

Avatar Park is expertly designed for advertising, product placement and corporate branding. The key to any successful online advertising effort is providing accurate, audience demographics. That's where the Avatar Park Player Plug-In comes in handy.

The player begins Avatar Park outside the scope of the experience. They sit in a room in the BigWorld yet they are different from the rest of the world, in that they are about to enter a fantasy environment as the main character, the hero. But here's the catch. A human player cannot enter the electronic world inhabited by avatars without first becoming an electronic presence themselves. How does a human player accomplish this feat?

Avatar Park is structured in a way that takes advantage of what the Internet and World Wide Web really is— an interconnected, worldwide computing and communications system. Email, chat rooms, browsers, and plug-ins are all common terminology to the active web explorer. Avatar Park utilizes the "plug-in" concept by requiring players to register online to receive their free Avatar Player Plug-In software. Registration requires the user to complete a quick questionnaire (to gather user demographics). Once a user registers, they will receive an "instantaneous download" of the Avatar Player Plug-In (users don't actually receive anything...registering activates a hyperlink which will announce the following):

CRITICAL PATH:
A single correct path a user must follow to successfully complete an application.

> Download was successful!
> Your Avatar Player Plug-In has been automatically installed into your operating system.
>
> To enter Avatar Park, click here.

Why the virtual plug-in gimmick? Many great online experiences have died because they start out with a bang— lots of press and advertising support— then trail off into oblivion. Essentially, users visit, explore, and leave. They don't always come back. We have to reach out in the first moments of Avatar Park, gather a few bits of personal information, grab our players forcefully and get them excited about the road ahead.

The virtual plug-in concept allows us to gather demographic information about our users in an unobtrusive manner— they need to give us a little data before we give them a free experience. This information will be crucial if the producers hope to secure advertising/sponsorship revenue for Avatar Park.

The virtual plug-in concept will also allow the producers to notify players when the Avatar Park site is updated, when new zones are added, or when new merchandise is released.

Additionally, players will need to download the latest Avatar Player Plug-In (every six months or so) to gain access to the site. This "gimmick" ensures that our database will always be up-to-date with the latest player/user data.

We have intentionally avoided making predictions about Avatar Park because the reality of the online industry is: you can lose a significant portion of your

investment, or you can earn a profit of several times your investment, or you can realize numerous outcomes in between. Internet/online/web ventures are simply unpredictable.

With that in mind, however, our approach to the online business is to put as many factors on our side in order to favor success, based on our past experience and a realistic sense of interactive media industry trends. This philosophy includes:

1. Choosing a genre which has shown a consistently strong potential for generating profits world-wide, and choosing a story and characters that are universal in its content and theme.

2. Creating a product where celebrity voices with domestic and international marketability could appear as guest avatar voices.

3. Utilizing a phony "plug-in" marketing gimmick to aid in demographic data gathering for advertisers. The virtual plug-in concept is also a great marketing gimmick for the producers of Avatar Park. Major industry trade magazines will catch wind of our demographic-gathering "gimmick" and write about it, especially since we are mimicking a common internet procedure (such as downloading the latest version of Netscape Navigator).

4. Building the web experience so that multiple zones can "spin-off" to better service a niche audience (think of the Maxis series SimCity, SimAnt, etc). For instance, the series will begin with Avatar Park. spinning off into Avatar High (an avatar-simulated high school environment). Avatar Sub (a simulated, Tom Clancy-ish submarine environment), etc.

5. Creating a series with a fun sense of humor and is easy to use, in order to appeal to the maximum number of players.

TURING TEST:

A criteria of artificial intelligence stating that a computer can be considered intelligent if it can fool a person into thinking that it is another person.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

A complete description of
the physical installation and
surroundings of an application,
including avatars and other items.

"What is your original face
before your mother and
father were born?"
Zen Koan

6. Creating a world that never sleeps. All stories and experiences are archived, therefore, the user may access the environment at their convenience–– 4:00 PM in the afternoon or 3:14 AM in the morning. You can't do that with a television show.

7. Setting the stage for a future software product to spin off into the consumer retail channel. The name "Avatar Park" will be branded into the consumer community in advance of any actual software release. In fact, consumers who have yet to log on to the online experience will assume that a software component already exists (Avatar Park Player Plug-In). Actual software versions of Avatar Park may include:

A) a construction kit with thousands of avatar parts––allowing consumers to assemble their very own avatar for use in the online world

B) a simulation game similar in tone and gameplay to SimCity.