

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

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Millennials and Their Avatars

by Marjii Middleton

Businesses are investing in virtual worlds in order to reach Millennials via their avatars – animated “residents” that take on the persona of their user. Coca-Cola’s recent hit Superbowl commercial featured them. There are an estimated 19 million of these avatars walking around in virtual worlds such as *SecondLife*, *There* and *Cyworld*. If you include the school-aged kids and gamers experimenting on sites such as *Webkinz* and game consoles, figures estimate that the population will grow to more than 90 million in the next five years.

What is the appeal of these avatars? They are just plain fun. Our family spent a couple of hours creating our avatars for Xbox Live. And for businesses, the bottom line is the bottom line – they’ve developed a real-world economy. Last July, avatar users completed millions of small currency transactions that reached a high of \$31.3M in real money. Reuters reports a steady gain in the number of in-world businesses like Anshe Chung who, with a modest investment, pocketed a cool million in 2007 selling real-estate that she developed on *SecondLife*.

Social networking and gaming sites hope that the use of these animated representations will encourage users to stay on their sites longer to boost small transactions. Manufacturers and retailers aspire to get more face-time for their brands which translate to a gain in market share over time. What are the implications for managers in the workplace?

Avatars build community in a way that engages Millennials for hours. When used for training and job development, these avatars make the exchange active rather than passive and can improve learning retention. Businesses can also use these worlds as a cost-effective means to encourage interaction among employees who can’t physically meet together. Enterprise companies such as IBM, whose employees meet on a private island in *Second Life*, understand this and have set up internal networking sites to help their employees collaborate and learn. Even our local librarian has joined the action by creating a sustainable green library on *SecondLife*. She holds meetings, “works” at the information desk in the library, and recruits real volunteers via their avatars!

While investing in a presence on a single site used by a relatively small population may seem impractical now, managers should not dismiss the application entirely. Cyber worlds will soon evolve to include the ability of avatars to “float” between applications from many devices. Businesses can therefore establish one presence for multiple uses across communication, ecommerce, and other channels. A presence in this environment can prove more cost-efficient for a company than its current alternatives.



Marjii Middleton is the Center’s special projects manager.

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“GenTistics”

In a recent survey, 85% of college grads indicated that they would relocate to another U.S. city, and 70% would consider living abroad.

-Experience, Inc

Check out [Bob's blog](#).



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Tech Tools for Teaching?

This year teachers are not scolding kids to put their electronic devices away during class, but instructing them to take them out so that they can learn something. That's because math teachers such as Ron Elliott at Brookcliff Middle School in Colorado are using technology devices as teaching tools. We're not talking about laptops, PDA's, new software, or other productive gadgets. Traditionally reserved for fun, teachers have discovered unique ways to use Wiimotes and iPods to engage children in the learning process.

The Wiimote, a motion sensitive remote that accompanies Nintendo's game console, is essentially a handheld computer and projector, and with a few modifications, it can convert almost any surface into an interactive white board for about \$40. In order to demonstrate a variety of math concepts such as statistics, Elliot has facilitated fantasy football leagues in the classroom for the past 16 years. He claims that the devices make the process more interactive and easier to teach.

Kindergarteners in the same school district go home with strict orders that they are to take out their iPods for their homework. As part of a pilot reading program, teachers have loaded the devices with their own voices reading the students' favorite books, with cues of when to turn the page and a summary of the stories. The reading time amounts to an extra 20 minutes of instruction nightly, which teachers hope will help struggling students better prepare for first grade.

Case Study Corner

With the economy the way it is, we hear from a number of applicants who are clearly overqualified for the jobs to which they are applying. I realize that they might be willing to work for the compensation we offer, but won't they just leave when better times return? Besides, how motivated will they be if they feel like they've had to settle for a lesser position?

Your concern is wide spread among employers at the present time. Yes, we will continue to see an abundance of overqualified applicants for the foreseeable future. In addition, many of these individuals are workforce veterans faced with considerable bills. But there are two sides to this situation and your success is dependent upon which approach you adopt.

On one side, you can hire these individuals assuming that they will depart when the economy improves. In that case, you're really settling as much as they are. On the other side, you can work harder to select the individuals within this applicant pool who are open to throwing themselves into the job and looking for ways to make it stimulating. While it is human nature to hunker down when times get tough, lean times also provide opportunities to rethink systems, design new products and work smarter. The individual who can do the job with his eyes closed may also be the person who would embrace the challenge of taking on special projects, thinking of ways to add to the bottom line, mentoring others, and making a place for himself in the company's long-term plans.

Yes, compensation may be an issue when the economy strengthens. But a lot can happen between now and then. Besides, there are those out there who are more focused on the quality of the job than just the take-home pay. Next month I will address the issue of how to select these overqualified gems.

Millennial Mommy Tracked

Millenials redefine The Mommy Track. For the first time since the National Center for health statistics began recording this data, the average age for women to begin motherhood fell to age 25. The largest increase in first-time births occurred in women aged 20-24 at 5%. What's behind this phenomenon?

According to The *WSJ's* Work & Family expert Sue Shellenbarger, the Millennial generation's massive size could be skewing the numbers, and a one-year decline does not necessarily indicate a long-term trend.

Nevertheless, experts also see a change in attitude about the career vs. family dilemma that most women face. Much like their Boomer parents, this younger generation does not see the two as mutually exclusive. They assume that they can have both, but on their own terms. Not feeling compelled to prove themselves for a decade on the job before starting a family, a great number of Millennial mothers work day jobs, but put off long-term careers until their children are in school. Others indicate that they want their children to have close ties with their Boomer parents.

Perks of Turning 60

- No one expects you to run – anywhere.
- You can live without sex but not without your glasses.
- People no longer view you as a hypochondriac.
- Your joints are more accurate than the National Weather Service.