



National Center for Technology Innovation
Advancing Technology Innovations for All Students

NCTI 2007 Innovator's Conference

Date: Thursday, November 15, 2007
Panel: Social Media: Where the Action Is
Names of Presenters: Tracy Gray, Peter Grunwald, Everett Harper, Sam Simon

Summary

Sam Simon, President, Issue Dynamics Inc. (moderator)

Sam introduced the session by asking how telecommunications can be made accessible to individuals with disabilities. He cited technology as a major factor because accessibility must be built into the design phase of many innovations like Facebook and Second Life. He closed his introduction by reiterating the question, "How can we make technology accessible?" See the presentation for more detailed information.

Tracy Gray, Director, National Center for Technology Innovation

Tracy began her presentation by focusing on the message of *Shift Happens*, [see conference blog](#). The video's 25 million [YouTube](#) hits clearly demonstrate that social media is not a passing fad. She emphasized statistics showing that youth with disabilities have less access to resources at home and the Internet along with other innovative technologies which could serve as great equalizers for youth with special needs. She closed her presentation with the hope that the panel will inspire participants to engage consumers directly and use social media to promote the potential of assistive and learning technologies. In an effort to "walk the walk", NCTI produced an Issue Brief on Social Media and invites comments from interested parties on the draft prior to finalization, add comments at [Using the Power of Social Media](#). [See Tracy's presentation](#) for more detailed information.

Peter Grunwald, Founder and President, Grunwald Associates

Peter's presentation centered on the divide between the overwhelmingly hesitant school district policies unsure of social media's role within instruction and younger students' habits of embracing the new technology as a creative outlet. Peter's surveys on educator and family technology use synthesized in the recent study, [Creating and Connecting](#), underwritten by National School Boards Association, MySpace, Microsoft, and Verizon, provided data for his discussion. Peter showed that 25% of kids on social networking websites can be considered "regular producers." A major misunderstanding visible in the data appears to be around the content of students' social networking, with a surprising 60% of kids discussing education and schoolwork regularly. While schools seem to be overly concerned with the child's safety, online "negative experiences" are reported in similar rates to the "real life." Less than 1% of kids actually met an adult online and connected with them offline. He closed his presentation by reporting that classroom Internet use continues to increase alongside school officials' hopes that social networking can broaden kids' horizons.

Everett Harper, Director of Community Initiatives, Linden Lab, Creator of Second Life

Everett's presentation introduced [Second Life](#) by describing it as a "3D Internet." His key points detailed below illustrate the multitude of tools available to users to "get into somebody else's context" and form meaningful relationships and communities:

- There are 10 million sign-ups with 1.5 million active users and a median age of 34 exploring a virtual space the size of mainland London.
- \$8 million dollars in real US currency exchanged hands in the past year.



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- 20% of people's time in world is spent creating. Linden Lab's works to manage the content that their users create.
- Simon Stevens illustrates one application targeted toward individuals with special needs with his "Wheelies" nightclub found at <http://www.secondability.com> on Second Life. Other education-related programs can be found at <http://secondlifegrid.net/programs>.

See [Everett's presentation](#) for more detailed information.

Discussion:

1. *To what degree are there federal and state uses for Second Life and are there accessibility issues revolving around 508 compliance?*

Everett Harper: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Department of Homeland Security are some examples of users. John Lester spearheads Second Life's concerns in health and accessibility. We would like all the expertise that exists in the audience to help "co-create with us."

2. *Comment: Accessibility is an issue. It is a problem not just for your content creators. I know you innovate first, but I suggest you keep the accessibility issue in mind because there is a real 508 problem. It will be a couple of years before the blind associations begin suing. You should be building accessibility in the design. Something must be built into the platform.*

3. *Comment: Adaptive technology companies should partner with you. As these tools are deployed, you have the blind geeks that can create things around it. We are active on the Internet. You should partner with the AT companies.*

Everett Harper: Thank you for the offer.

4. *Comment: Many virtual technologies are coming from the gaming world dealing with these accessibility issues. We want to create a central clearinghouse so people will have a pathway to Second Life. There is a discussion ongoing within education and the gaming community. The solution is not clear yet. It needs to be done organically.*

5. *Comment: As you come up with these technologies, be thinking about how they can get to parents and families. Parents only know that Second Life is bad. Schools say the child has to read by the book first. Schools are the gatekeepers.*

Sam Simon: There are two issues that cross this area. One is how do you educate everyone and the second is universal design. We do not want to quash innovation, but somehow we will come back and make sure of the design.

6. *Comment: What are the implications of the distinction between adults and teens in Second Life?*

Everett Harper: The main grid is adult life. One of the challenges is adult restricted access to teen life. It makes it difficult for schools to start classes on Second Life. In the next year we will be going through a lot of the policy issues revolving around how to go about having kids and adults in the same place with protection. We are trying to figure out that problem.

7. *Could Peter talk more about why his data minimizes the cyber bully?*

Peter Grunwald: We looked at it in the same context of safety. This is probably not as pronounced as the education field may think. [Educators] may respond to the squeaky wheel. However, cyber bullying is real and it does call for some vigilance and concern.