

Week 8: How SecondLife Changes Customer Service

Second Life is a 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its residents. Since opening to the public in 2003, it has grown explosively and today is inhabited by millions of people from around the globe. This new virtual world could become the first point of contact between companies and customers and could transform the whole customer experience. Read the following article:

http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/apr2007/gb20070410_481047.htm?campaign_id=rss_tech

Visit SecondLife at www.secondlife.com.

Answer the following questions on the discussion board:

- 1) How will customer relationships be different in a virtual world?**
- 2) How will supporting Second Life customers differ from supporting traditional customers?**
- 3) How will supporting Second Life customers differ from supporting Web site customers?**
- 4) What customer security and ethical issues might you encounter in Second Life?**

As always, you are encouraged to respond to other's postings.

Customer relationships in a virtual world are a delicate matter. The design of a web site is very important for presenting a favorable face to the customer. Similarly, the design of a business in SL is of chief importance. In a world where anything-goes design-wise, how do you want your customer service representatives to appear? The business must present something fantastic, that it could not present in the real world, if it wants to draw visitors into it.

Second Life provides a medium for simulating real world interactions online. It has the same benefits as teleconferencing or videoconferences, the ability to assemble many people from all around the world into a real-time interactions. NPR's Science Friday makes great use of this tool, hosting a studio audience in SL that they couldn't otherwise support. Public speakers also benefit. I once attended a talk by a favorite science fiction author who would not have attracted enough of an audience in any one local, but SL was perfect for finding enough interest from around the globe to come up with a great turn out.

Being a virtual world, Second Life is much less about providing the visitor information they can read, and all about giving them a place they can visit. If I were a homebuilder or architect, I would put model homes and buildings up to tour. If I were a game developer, I would let the visitors walk through a reconstruction of a level in my game. NASA and the Star Trek Fan Club both have "sandboxes" in SL, where visitors can design ships and lunar bases.

Misrepresentations could be a real problem in Second Life. What if someone designs an Avatar that looks just like the avatar of a customer service representative? Second Life

has no means for authenticating a person's identity. Another hurdle is the fact that SL uses Linden Dollars instead of real life currency, removing the ability to provide credit card transactions, along with the security measures built into them.