

utopia or dystopia?

transacted in Second Life in the past 24-hour period.

Increasingly, businesses are opting to create virtual equivalents of their offices and show rooms inside Second Life. Reuters news agency has opened a bureau in SL (secondlife.reuters.com), to which it has posted its own real life ('RL') journalists.

According to a report from Reuters on 9 November (in RL), IBM has announced plans to invest roughly \$10 million over the next 12 months in virtual worlds, including an expanded presence within Second Life in particular. The company has several virtual 'islands'. Recently, Chairman and Chief Executive Sam Palmisano visited SL, following a 'town hall' meeting with some 7,000 employees in China, to speak with the more than 250 IBM employees on one of the company's virtual islands.

In the same article, the company said it is already holding meetings and conducting development inside virtual worlds with about 20 major clients, including telecommunications and aerospace firms, a petroleum company that wants to use virtual worlds for training and 'a major grocer in the UK' that wants to build a virtual storefront that will allow consumers to buy real-world groceries online.

Mallis took QPIX NEWS on a tour of Second Life, during which time she introduced 'Tai Southard' (my avatar) to 'builders' named 'Xandia Mars' and 'Random Cole'.

Xandia and Random are two of the most accomplished 'builders' in Second Life. On the tour, we visited a house they'd built to mimic one in DESPERATEHOUSEWIVES (commissioned by the show's producers) and an entire 'American college town', which will

become a campus for an English language school.

Xandia and Random also collaborated with Mallis to help her build the SIM (effectively a set) for her 'machinima'.

Machinima is an entirely new film genre, in which computer generated imagery (animation) is rendered in real time using interactive three-dimensional game engines, rather than being created bespoke by commissioned animators. Machinima.com was launched in 2000 and there are now machinima film festivals around the world.

Mallis describes machinima as 'the process of creating an animated story using tools that already exist.'

The HeadCase machinima is set in Second Life and features a cast of four avatars who interact with a RL character. The machinima was scripted, much the same as any animated short film, rendered in SL, recorded on camera and then spliced with the live action video that was shot in front of a green screen. The narrative of the machinima introduces HeadCase's artificially intelligent avatars and explains the benefits of its 'authoring toolkit'.

Initially HeadCase will focus on developing digital humans for the gaming world but envisions other possible applications as well, including educational products.

For example, a HeadCase digital human might act as a substitute for written instructions to games where players live in virtual worlds. The avatar could give the player an overview of the game and then answer the player's questions as they come up.

In education, avatars could represent historical characters. 'Imagine telling your kids, "I want you to go



Jan Mallis' avatar Fijigirl starring in the HeadCase 'machinima'

to this web site and talk to this character named Plato,'" HeadCase chief executive Cathi Cox told the *New York Times* in October. 'A digital Plato could ostensibly serve as an educational tool, holding conversations about his life and writing.'

Customer-service systems are another possibility, with avatars that could answer questions online - and know when to 'bring in' a human.

HeadCase will launch its web site in early December (www.headcaselabs.com) and the next stage of development involves the release of a small 'widget' (an application that sits on your desktop) in the form of an astrologer called Izatso. Visitors to the HeadCase site will be able to ask her questions about health, love, sex, career and money. Izatso will respond with humorous astrological snippets mixed with celebrity gossip ('horoscops').

While engaging in these two-way conversations with visitors, Izatso will build up a huge data set to 'train' the HeadCase NLP software engine.

Mallis acknowledges there are a plethora of ethical issues associated with

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The secret to self distribution

Australian producer Rhonda Byrne used the 'secret' to make *THE SECRET* and to sell more than 250,000 copies of the DVD online without a major distribution partner. What is the secret to her success?

(below, top) Rhonda Byrne and
(below, bottom) Paul Harrington



Every year, SPAA Fringe patron Peter Broderick sings the praises of self-distribution and every year, profiles a small number of films that have been successfully distributed without a conventional theatrical release. This year, *THE SECRET* was one of those films. Broderick told delegates how the film was launched online on 26 March this year and by the end of April more than 20,000 copies of the DVD had been sold. By the end of October, he said 250,000 DVDs had been sold.

The launch followed an international viral marketing campaign resulting in *THE SECRET* database numbering 100,000s of viewers across the globe.

Even more fascinating is that fact that the production company behind *THE SECRET*, Prime Time Productions, was the first Australian company to premiere a full-length pay-per-view feature film on the web.

Prime Time Productions teamed up with Vividas to deliver full screen, broadcast quality pictures and sound direct to computers. Using this technology, viewers can pause, skip backwards and forwards and exit and return later to finish viewing the movie, all for the cost of US\$4.95.

'Feedback from the viewers of *THE SECRET* has been incredibly positive and moving,' says Prime Time Productions's principal Rhonda Byrne.

'And the viewing technology is simple and delivers terrific, high quality images. For most viewers, watching this

video will be just like switching on a TV... except the viewer chooses when to watch.'

According to Broderick, more than 90 per cent of those who watch the online version buy the DVD, which costs US\$29.95 (although there are discounts for bulk purchases).

The irony is that, although Prime Time Productions is an Australian company, Australian residents (along with those in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea) are as yet unable to watch the film online or buy the DVD. In Australia, this is because of a deal with the Nine Network that gives them an 'exclusive hold on it until 31 December 2006' says *THE SECRET* publicist John Stellar, who is based in California.

'As soon as they broadcast it OR the clock strikes 1/01/07, *THE SECRET* will be available for distribution nationwide in Australia,' he says.

Prime Time has set up US offices in Los Angeles and Chicago to undertake the marketing of *THE SECRET* on the web.

The online marketing tools are sophisticated, including opt-in newsletter subscriptions, RSS feeds, an automatic 'Share *THE SECRET*' email service which makes it easy for people to promote the film by 'word of mouth' to their friends, and code that web site owners can copy and paste to automatically display banners and other graphics that link to *THE SECRET* video preview page.

All this buzz online has generated interest amongst the mainstream media in the

United States. *THE SECRET* has been featured twice on CNN's *LARRY KING LIVE*, *EXTRA* (NBC) and *THE ELLEN DEGENERES SHOW*.

'There have been a number of screenings in the US at several independent film festivals, churches, other community groups and corporations,' says Stellar.

'*THE SECRET*'s white hot buzz is all due to people sharing with their friends and family on every continent.

'To date, there's no plan for a TV broadcast or theatrical release in the US.'

THE SECRET was created and executive produced by Rhonda Byrne, who is a former producer of the *DON LANE SHOW*, *LOGIE AWARDS*, *WORLD'S GREATEST COMMERICALS*, *MARRY ME*, *SENSING MURDER* and other television special events. Byrne launched Prime Time in 1994, after working as a senior producer for the Nine Network. But, 10 years later, she experienced a succession of traumatic events in her personal and professional life, culminating in the death of her father.

Then she read a book called *The Science of Getting Rich* and discovered the 'secret' that she says continues to transform her life. She immediately put into practice what she learned and used this secret to make *THE SECRET*.

Over a two-month period Byrne read hundreds of books written by and about people who also understood the secret, including Plato, Da Vinci, Galileo, Napoleon, Hugo, Beethoven, Lincoln, Edison,



Einstein and Carnegie.

Contrary to what she had previously thought, she discovered that there were people who were aware of this information. Actually, there were lots of the them, and they included some of the world's greatest living scientists, philosophers and authors.

'Around the world, different fragments of the secret were being offered, to anyone that would listen. All that was needed was someone to pull all of the pieces together.'

The day that the Prime Time Productions team arrived in the US to film the 'living masters' of the secret, they had only one interview lined up. In a matter of a few weeks, the team filmed a total of 52 interviews. Wherever they went, more and more people would emerge.

Byrne and her team spoke with those in the fields of business, economics, medicine, psychology, history, theology and science. Byrne calls this people - and some 25 are featured in her film - the 'teachers'.

Dr Denis Waitley used various aspects of the 'secret' to train Olympic athletes and Apollo astronauts. Best selling authors and philosophers who understand the secret include Bob Proctor, Michael Bernard Beckwith, Jack Canfield, Lisa Nichols, John Assaraf, James Ray and Dr Joe Vitale.

Byrne says Bob Proctor, in particular, is a 'living legend'. He was, however, initially difficult to track down but was visiting Aspen for the first time in his life, when the production crew were in town, and said that 'the universe had brought him there'.

Doctors in the fields of medicine and quantum physics explain the science behind the 'secret'.

Byrne's thesis is that the secret is 4000 years old (originating in the 'Emerald Tablet', the earliest hint of it) but until recently has been known only to a fortunate few.

'It has been discovered, coveted, suppressed, hidden, lost and recovered. Fragments of the secret have been found in the oral traditions, in literature, in religions and philosophies throughout the centuries. For the first time, all the pieces of the secret come together in an incredible revelation, which are life transforming for all who experience it.'

Byrne herself used the secret to make THE SECRET. She says that as her company began production, 'as if by magic', the perfect people to make THE SECRET began to appear in her life.

'Suddenly the office was filled with people, all working to complete the most ambitious project any of them had worked on. And without fail, each person needed for the team materialised exactly when he or she was needed. Every single person was taught the secret and together worked in total joy as they prepared this message for people worldwide.'

The message that Byrne and her team, including producer Paul Harrington, director Drew Heriot and production manager Glenda Bell, synthesised into the multi-million dollar feature length film is that one's thoughts and feelings will manifest, according to the universal 'law of attraction'. This includes living in the 'eternal moment of now', when there is no time and there is no space.

The film features interviews, dramatic recreation, historical re-enactment, comedy, animation, graphic design and CGI. It presents instances



A scene from THE SECRET

of eradicating disease, acquiring massive wealth, overcoming obstacles and achieving what many would regard as the impossible.

Because the secret helped Byrne turn around her life and make the film, she agreed in the final stages of editing to appear in the opening scenes.

'I had no intentions of appearing in it at all,' she says. 'I really like getting up on a Sunday morning and nobody recognising me.'

Everyone who appeared in THE SECRET, however, repeatedly told Byrne that it was her calling - the secret behind THE SECRET is Rhonda's story.

The very frank DVD commentary reveals in more detail how the secret was used to create THE SECRET.

The summary in the 'special features' section of the DVD includes a concise explanation of the science behind the law of attraction.

The web site profiles the 25 teachers featuring in the film, with audio narrative.

Find out more by visiting www.thesecond.tv

By Kerry Sunderland

