

SHARING OUR SUCCESS

Get Virtual – Designing Learning in Second Life

A White Paper Describing a First-of-Its-Kind Live ASTD Chapter Meeting Simultaneously Broadcast in Second Life

By Joe Novosel

Note: This white paper was submitted to the National Association of Training and Development (ASTD) and won a national SOS training award as a result. As a result, this white paper was published by the national ASTD on their site.

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| Intended Audience: | <p>Target audiences included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>For the live meeting on the ground</u>: Learning, human resources, and organizational development professionals in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.• <u>For the concurrent virtual meeting in Second Life</u>: Learning, human resources, and organizational development professionals from across the country and ASTD chapter leaders in other locals interested in partnering on projects or in using this meeting as a model for one they could host at their chapters. |
| Need Addressed: | <p>Our community of learning professionals has expressed a strong desire to gain exposure to new learning technologies. Additionally, as a result of the very difficult economic environment and the flattening of membership growth it was causing, we were looking for a way to excite our community, and draw more guest participants who could potentially become chapter members. To achieve this, we felt the following needed to be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Produce a meeting that would attract members who haven't attended in a while.• Expand the potential audience through a cutting-edge program with broad appeal beyond professional learning and development.• Produce a meeting featuring increased interactivity and engagement.• Establish credibility as one of the premier professional development organizations to be associated with in Northern California. |
| Strategy | <p>The strategy was to use Second Life as a technology to animate the topic of the meeting, "Designing Learning in Second Life." As such, the simulcast meeting was experiential, in addition to being interactive, engaging, and entertaining.</p> |
| Costs/Resource | <p>The cost to implement this event exceeded the Mount Diablo ASTD chapter's regular monthly meetings by approximately \$400. This was to</p> |

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Use: cover our speaker's travel expenses from out of state. However, the net cost was essentially revenue-neutral due to funds generated from a combination of increased meeting attendance in Danville, additional income from simultaneous virtual attendance in Second Life, as well as new membership receipts.

Implementation: Producing this meeting required effort focused on two primary areas: logistics and promotion. Logistically, this was a more difficult meeting to produce than a typical monthly meeting. However, thanks to the partnership we formed with our speaker (Mike Abrams) and the hard work of several board members, it went off smoothly. Mike advised us of technical requirements and helped market the event through his established channels. In addition to our normal marketing communication channels, board members teamed up to leverage their own personal and professional social networking channels to drive our meeting announcement to a wider audience. When navigating to our chapter's website, visitors were redirected to a flash animation that promoted the event and to an announcement page that included strategic links to Second Life. This created interest and allowed potential attendees to begin their Second Life experience prior to the meeting. We also established dual registration facilities to accommodate enrollment for live attendance as well as the simulcast virtual event in Second Life. One aspect of the event that was very well received was that virtual participants in Second Life and live participants at the meeting in Danville were able to interact with each other during the meeting. Attendees in Danville were also able to watch the virtual attendees in Second Life.

Note: Additional technical requirements included two projector screens, high bandwidth connectivity with excellent throughput, and a wireless microphone system for the speaker.

Outcomes:

- The San Francisco Bay Area is known for its leading role in technology. Accomplishing this meeting in Second Life, we learned that it aligned with the area's culture, its demographics, and our membership needs. That, combined with the board members' ability to leverage social networking as a marketing tool, we were able to create a buzz and a new round of interest in the value of the Mount Diablo Chapter and ASTD. Other networking and nonprofit organizations from a broad range of professions notified their membership of our upcoming meeting. Even now, that larger community of newly developed partnerships references this meeting, sharing related Second Life links that may be of value to us all.
- We served both our local learning community and learning professionals across multiple time zones in the area we find of

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greatest interest – learning technology.

- We established new relationships with other ASTD chapters (e.g. Hawaii, Texas, etc.), and built on our existing relationships.
- We pioneered a model: Simultaneously broadcasting a local chapter meeting via the web, while also simulating a chapter meeting online through virtualization technology, in addition to integrating these two meetings into one and providing interactivity between the two types of attendees. By doing so, other chapters and partners can use this event and our lessons learned as resources that can be leveraged.
- Another local chapter produced a similar event that used our event as a model.
- We leveraged new funding strategies that allowed us to produce a bigger, costlier, and more sophisticated event that in the end remained revenue neutral.
- We attracted new guests and prospective members that included our traditional learning professionals, as well as human resources and OD practitioners. This resulted in the best-attended regular meeting in years that also achieved the highest audience satisfaction ratings who reported the highest learning transfer. In addition, this meeting started another growth phase in our chapter's membership that we plan to build upon.
- We leveraged new marketing and communication strategies that produced positive results.
- Identifying key areas of interest for not only our current membership, but also prospective members in crossover professional channels enabled the Mt. Diablo ASTD Chapter to put our membership back on a growth curve. We believe that growth had flattened out as a result of the ongoing very difficult economic conditions. The success of this meeting underscores the need to understand our value proposition, the importance of challenging the status quo, and taking the risks necessary to stretch and grow.
- We earned the respect of our attendees by modeling what we were teaching and demonstrating. What better way to illustrate the benefits of Second Life to a learner or learning practitioner than to immerse the participants in the actual experience, both in person and virtually, while simultaneously allowing all participants to interact with each other? Indeed, engaging learning and engaging meetings are both relevant and interactive.
- We learned that alignment with the cultural and geographical influences in the design and focus of future organizational programs is key. Our Mount Diablo chapter is located just east of San Francisco, and between the Silicon Valley and Sacramento. We are in the technological epicenter of the country. As such, this simulcast

Lessons
Learned:

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meeting and presentation on designing learning in Second Life resonated hugely with our community. It leads us to consider other ways we can create such an alignment. For example, we are close to the capital of the state with the 8th largest economy in the world, so we need to consider how political influences affect our culture and create opportunity for our chapter to better serve our community.

- When taking on a big initiative, it is vital that you partner with someone who has the knowledge and resources to ensure its success. The selection of Mike Abrams as our speaker and Second Life facilitator was a key contributor to our ability to showcase technology in the actual learning environment. In addition to his stature as an expert in using Second Life for learning, Mike's past experience as a manager of corporate information technology added to our team the requisite knowledge, skill, and experience needed to successfully implement such an ambitious endeavor.
- We learned that as a board, if we take on bigger challenges, stretch and try new things, we can instill excitement in our members and new energy in the chapter. To illustrate with a quote, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." We want to achieve more, so we'll listen to our members, think outside the box, and take on bold challenges.
- ASTD National's upcoming events posting area on that website.
- ASTD National's LinkedIn group: In our search for the right expert, board member Haruka Yamashita found Mike Abrams on this group. (Incidentally, our Mt. Diablo ASTD chapter is also on LinkedIn as well, and it was one of the social networks we leveraged in our marketing.)
- ASTD's Island on Second Life was referenced in our meeting.
- Our chapter's website
 - Promotional Flash animation on an added splash page
 - Link to a podcast featuring our speaker Mike Abrams
 - Links to dual registration facilities and an online flyer
 - Links to Second Life
 - Links to examples of best practices in Second Life.
- Our chapter's board members' social network (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, email, job networking groups, etc.).
- Our chapter's marketing and communication tools (email broadcasting, registration tools, social media, etc.).
- Board of Director (BOD) cohesiveness, commitment and desire to achieve unprecedented value in our chapter and the ASTD organization.

ASTD
Resources
(Chapter and
National)
Leveraged