Using Virtual Worlds to Deliver Mental Health Counseling Services

Dick Dillon
Senior VP, Planning and Development
Preferred Family Healthcare, Inc.
“This telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us.”

Western Union internal memo, 1876
“I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.”

Thomas Watson, Chairman, IBM 1943
“There is no reason why anyone would want a computer in their home.”

Ken Olsen, Founder, Digital Equipment Corp. 1977
"A new idea is first condemned as ridiculous and then dismissed as trivial, until finally, it becomes what everybody knows."

William James, (Past APA President) 1879
Did You Know...?
“When I took office, only high energy physicists had ever heard of what is called the World Wide Web… Now even my cat has its own page.”

Bill Clinton
Have you used digital media lately?
Have you used digital media lately?
Evolution of the multidimensional Web

Pre-Web

Pre-Web Internet

World Wide Web

Web 2.0

Rich, interactive graphical UI

3-D digital experience

Hybrid virtual/real-world experience

Richness of user experience

Slide Courtesy of Forrester Research
Web 3.0 Operationalized: “Second Life”
Non-Profits in Second Life

ACLU
Amer. Cancer Society
America’s First Harvest
Kiva
National Council (for Community Behavioral Health)
New Media Consortium
Preferred Family Healthcare
And hundreds of others (see http://www.nbhorizons.com/list.htm)
Interactivity + Immersion = Engagement

“Web 3 – D will deliver in the next three to five years.”

- Erica Driver, Forrester Research
Face-to-face doesn’t necessarily mean in-person

In-Person Meeting

Face-to-face

Simulated In-Person Meeting

Video conferencing & telepresence

Immersive

Source: ThinkBalm
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Research Supports Use of Virtual Worlds

Gallese, V., et. al – Mirror Neurons and Embodied Simulation.

The same parts of brain activate when we are watching and identifying with an action as if we were doing the action ourselves.
Research Supports Use of Virtual Worlds

Jeremy Bailenson, Stanford Virtual Human Interaction Lab – Vicarious Reinforcement

How you appear in a virtual world can affect your behavior in real life. People who watch their avatars engage in physical exercise are more likely to do so themselves in real life.
Research Supports Use of Virtual Worlds

Zach Rosenthal – Duke University
Virtual Crack House (cue extinction)

“What we’re trying to do is take people into a virtual crack-related neighborhood or crack-related setting and have them experience cravings, just like they would in the real world,”
AA Groups and Meetings in Second Life:

**Friends of Bill W. Group**
* Monday 11 am - 12noon
* Tuesday 6 pm - 7pm
* Wednesday 6am - 7am
* Wednesday 9 PM -10 PM
* Thursday 11 am - 12noon
* Friday 6pm - 7pm
* Saturday 10:30am - 12noon
* Sunday 4 pm - 5pm

Temporary Location on Recovery Island:

**New Beginnings Women's Group**
* Sunday 6 PM - 7 PM

**Serenity Forest Group**
* Wednesday 12 noon - 1pm
* Wednesday 7pm - 8pm (Voice+Chat)
* Friday 9am - 10am

**Serenity Shore AA Group**
* Women's Meeting Wednesday 6 PM - 7PM

**Sober Life**
* Monday 6pm - 7pm
* Tuesday 8pm - 9pm : LGBT and friends. All welcome
* Thursday 8pm - 9pm

**Successful Sobriety**
* Thursday 5pm - 6pm (Speaker Meeting)
* Saturday 6pm - 7pm

**Recovery Island**
Tuesday 7am - 8am
Preferred Family Healthcare’s Presence in Second Life
Second Life Main Grid

- Preferred Family HC Island
- Non-Profit Commons
- ARTC Art Gallery
- Commonwealth
Substance Use Disorder is a Multi-Faceted illness involving physical, mental, emotional and spiritual components.
The Portal

In December, 2008 the Missouri Foundation for Health awarded PFH a $300,000.00 grant to study the delivery of care in a virtual world...The Portal was created for this project.
Virtual Counseling

The actual delivery of services, both group and individual, via patient and clinician avatars is currently possible.
Role Playing

Works with staff and with clients.
• Allow “oversight” by staff managers, clinicians.
• Complete control over scenarios, or use all of SL as a “living laboratory”.

Real Help in a Virtual World  6/24/2008
Staff Training

• Bring together staff from distributed program sites
• Collaborative Learning environment
• No down time for travel
• Machinima creation allows future sharing
Virtual Conferencing

• Allows real-time sharing, review and commentary
• Allows users to create and develop unique objects
• Innovative ways to educate and inform others and to display data
• Time and cost savings in bringing people together within and across disciplines and geography
Virtual Counseling
Potential

- Flexibility of service delivery
- Access
- “It will happen, whether we like it or not”
- Research opportunities
- Impact of anonymity (full or partial)
Virtual Counseling
Concerns

• Lack of control
• Impact on Therapeutic Alliance
• Loss of meta-communication
• “It’s not the way we’ve always done it”
• Impact of anonymity (full or partial)
“Like the Web in 1993, most of the good ideas haven’t been thought of yet. “

Sibley Verbeck, CEO, Electric Sheep Co.,
on NBCs Today Show (March, 2008)
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