



PRESS RELEASE

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NMC Virtual Worlds Announces Plans for 2008

Today, on the anniversary of the founding of [NMC Virtual Worlds](#), the New Media Consortium announced new directions for the NMC's special services unit in the coming year, and affirmed the continuation of the work it began a year ago and continued throughout 2007. NMC Virtual Worlds provides a full palette of support to educational institutions wishing to explore, build, or establish a presence in a range of virtual worlds. The program offers all of its services to educational institutions and museums on a simple cost-recovery basis, resulting in deeply discounted pricing for qualified institutions.

In 2007, NMC Virtual Worlds served more than eighty colleges and universities, providing services from full virtual development to special custom tools and builds to leases. As NMC CEO Dr. Larry Johnson notes, "2007 was a year in which campuses made their entries into Second Life in great numbers, and as a result there is a considerable critical mass of educational institutions now existent in Second Life — more than 1200 educational islands were created in 2007, and the number of educational projects launched last year in Second Life is many times that."

"2008 also promises to see strong educational use of Second Life, but with a new focus. Projects in 2008 are much more likely to be about creating learning experiences than virtual campuses. This is, in my view, a very positive trend, and reflects the increasing skill and understanding of virtual spaces among educators across the board."

"NMC Virtual Worlds plans to continue the range of the efforts it launched in 2007 to support education in Second Life," said Johnson, "and we are planning several new initiatives for 2008. At the center of these initiatives is a renewed focus on immersive learning, and continued support for educators." New initiatives for 2008 include:

- **The NMC Virtual Learning Prize.** The NMC Virtual Worlds team will be soliciting ideas for the development of immersive content from educators around the globe. Twenty ideas will be selected in 2008 for development. Each Virtual Learning prize recipient will receive \$5,000 US in cash incentives and virtual services that can be devoted to realizing the idea in Second Life. Recipients will have their idea funded with \$4,500 US in premium development services from NMC and receive an honorarium of \$500 US in cash. The copyright for prize winning ideas will of course remain with the inventor, but the products created as part of this program will go into open source and be distributed royalty free to the educational community. This program will be launched in March, 2008.

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- **The Educational Resource Repository.** The NMC is devoting an entire sim for an educational resources repository that will be located on Learning, an island within the NMC Campus. To seed the content of this repository, and to encourage other developers to support education in Second Life, the NMC will release virtually all the content it produced in 2007 into open source — buildings, meeting facilities, educational tools, avatars, clothing, equipment, scripts, and much more. The amount of material that the NMC has licensed to release in this way numbers in the thousands of objects, and the NMC is committed to adding to it throughout the year. The repository, in which everything from shoes to amphitheatres will be available for a single Linden dollar (simply to enable tracking via counts), will also include resources donated by other developers. The first of these is Stephane Zugzwang's renowned Virtual Reality Room, which is already available. The NMC's Educational Resources Repository will open February 1, 2008
- **Development of New Forms of Architecture.** Among the interests of the NMC Virtual Worlds team for 2008 is to explore new concepts of architecture that may be especially suited for virtual spaces. The first of these, created by real-life architect and NMC Virtual Worlds developer CJ Holden, is an extremely flexible modular structure that works with the SL building grid to allow the construction of simple or complex structures organically in literally minutes.
- **Live mentoring for new entrants into Second Life.** High on the list of planned enhancements for the NMC's Orientation Island experience is the implementation of a mentoring program. There is strong support for this in the Second Life educational community, and a presence-aware mentor notification system has already been piloted. The mentor community is expected to launch sometime in the next 30 days.

"We hope these new initiatives will stimulate the same kind of development around learning in 2008 as we saw around establishing presences in 2007," said Johnson of these new directions. I am especially excited by the NMC Virtual Learning Prize, which will help content experts across a wide range of disciplines realize their visions for learning in virtual space."

"The release of the NMC's content from 2007 into open source is an expression of our deepest values," continued Johnson, "and an outgrowth of the way the NMC conducts its work in the real world. Every product the NMC has ever produced has been ultimately released under Creative Commons or open-source software licenses."

The mission of *NMC Virtual Worlds* is to help learning-focused organizations to explore the potential of virtual spaces in a manner that builds on community knowledge, is cost-effective, and ensures high quality. To those ends, the NMC and NMC Virtual Worlds provide a comprehensive set of premium development services for education and training, and conducts an ongoing series of events, conferences, and programs. These include:

- **Supporting the educational community in Second Life.** The NMC hosts more than twenty islands designated as educational communities, providing parcels in these communities for as little as \$100/year. Each of these communities has space designated for fellowships, and nearly two dozen educators are currently the beneficiaries of these year-long fellowships. Via the extensive NMC Campus (now numbering nearly 50 sims),

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NMC also provides educators free access to a wide variety of venues for conferences, meetings and other events. Full sims have been provided at no cost for several educational proof-of-concept projects over the past year, including the renowned *Dante's Inferno* project. The NMC's biweekly *Teacher's Buzz* sessions allow educators to dialog around ideas and to discuss interesting developments and projects in Second Life. At the present time, more than 7,800 individuals have joined the NMC's community in Second Life.

- **Helping educators become comfortable and productive in Second Life.** Foremost among these efforts is the NMC's Orientation Island, open to anyone who wishes to use it, and the NMC's custom registration process, which allows people to quickly open a Second Life account. Currently hundreds of people a month enter Second Life via this process, which is open to all educators and their students. The NMC Orientation Island, modeled on the city of San Francisco, provides basic and advanced level orientations, orientations to educational uses of Second Life, and an orientation to the culture of Second Life. In addition, the NMC has offered a number of "studio" sessions on topics ranging from Second Life photography to sculpture, machinima to fashion design, and pedagogical strategies for virtual worlds.
- **Providing affordable high-level development services.** The NMC created a wide range of fully-realized sims in 2007, including dozens of campuses, a fully realized hospital, business centers, immersive learning experiences, art installations, meeting venues, and more. For campuses needing high level support, the NMC's services are priced at cost, and include every aspect of creation in Second Life, from design and building, terraforming, landscaping, scripting, avatars, clothing, equipment, realistic recreations, and immersive learning experiences.
- **Hosting the NMC's Series of Virtual Symposia.** In 2007, the NMC hosted three virtual symposia — one in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation on the Impact of Digital Media; one on Creativity; and the most recent, this past December, on the Evolution of Communication. These events attract audiences both inside and outside Second Life. The NMC Campus includes the "NMC Conference Center," a sim specially designed to support conferences in Second Life, and the home of the NMC's Series of Virtual Symposia. The NMC Conference Center is made available to educational organizations at no cost for large-scale events in Second Life.
- **Supporting the Arts.** In real life, the arts have always been important to the NMC and its members, and in Second Life, the NMC is one of the most active supporters of the arts, from traditional forms to highly unique art only possible in Second Life, to performance, dance, and theater. The Aho Museum of Art, on the original NMC Campus sim, is one of the premier museums in Second Life, and home to a phenomenal permanent collection of Second Life art that spans several sims. The island of Ars Simulacra devotes its land space to an ongoing series of exhibitions and installations throughout the year, and is also home to the ZeroG Skydancers, as part of one of the NMC's several art fellowships. NMC Arts Lab is a sim devoted to experimental large scale installations, and currently features "Full Immersion," a 256x256x720 installation from DanCoyote Antonelli that uses every cubic meter of the sim. Full and partial sims are often loaned at no cost to promising artists to

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realize a large scale vision. An ongoing series of art-related events and dialogs is also part of the NMC's commitment to the arts in Second Life.

- **Providing fellowships for promising ideas.** The NMC is committed to ensuring that the expression of ideas need not be limited by budgets, and as such provides educators and artists a wide range of fellowships to support their work in Second Life. In 2007, more than 60 talented individuals directly benefited from one or more of these fellowships.
- **Documenting efforts.** The NMC Campus Observer blog chronicles not only events on the NMC Campus, but educational projects and activities across Second Life. The blog attracted more than 14,000 unique readers a month throughout 2007, from more than 25 countries all around the world. In addition, the NMC continues to produce a steady stream of machinima of Second Life events, podcasts with prominent Second Life residents, papers and surveys, and much more.

The NMC has an extensive presence in *Second Life* currently, and the NMC Campus community has grown to nearly 100 co-located sims, of which nearly 70 are contiguous. More than twenty of these islands have been designated as educational lands for the use of faculty and others. The home of NMC Virtual Worlds is the [NMC Campus](#), considered one of the premiere educational destinations in Second Life. The sims comprising the NMC Campus estate are the home for a wide range of educational tools, services, and meeting spaces, as well as a functioning museum and library, a planetarium, and much more — all provided to educators at no cost.

To learn more about *NMC Virtual Worlds*, see the unit's website at:
<http://virtualworlds.nmc.org>

To learn more about the NMC's work on behalf of higher education and its member institutions in *Second Life*, see the *NMC Campus Observer* blog at:
<http://www.nmc.org/sl>.

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About the NMC

The New Media Consortium (NMC) is an international 501(c)3 not-for-profit consortium of more than 200 leading colleges, universities, research centers, and museums dedicated to the exploration and use of new media and new technologies. The consortium serves as a catalyst for the development of new applications of technology to support learning and creative expression, and sponsors programs and activities designed to stimulate innovation, encourage collaboration, and stimulate dialog and understanding through the exploration of promising ideas, technologies, and applications. For more information on the NMC, see its web site at www.nmc.org.

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