

## NEED TO KNOW

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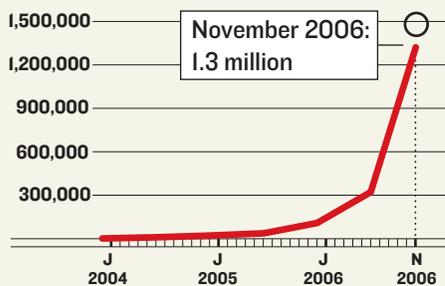
SURREAL  
WORLD

Virtual world offers a place to create alter egos and live a 'Second Life'

Musician Ben Folds' avatar stands in front of a crowd at the opening of the Aloft hotel in Second Life.



## Second life users



**Getting there:** Joining Second Life is free after downloading the company's software from [www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com). An upgrade costs \$9.95 for the right to build objects and purchase property.

**Median age:** 32

**Sex:** In-world residents are typically 57 percent male.

**Currency:** Linden dollars (L257 = \$1 U.S.)

**Etiquette:** Be nice. Most Second Life areas are labeled "Safe," meaning no violence, no indecency or harassment (practical jokes are called "griefing"). Violations typically result in a warning, followed by suspension and the permanent boot for repeat offenders.

**Crime:** Yep, even Second Life has shady characters. Don't give your password to anyone. As for casinos and con artists, a fool and his Linden dollars are soon parted.

**By Robert K. Elder**  
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

**SAN FRANCISCO** If the virtual world of Second Life has a Mt. Olympus, the place where gods flex their power and influence, it's here at parent company Linden Lab.

That makes Linden Lab CEO Philip Rosedale a Zeus-like figure. From an open, cubicle-free office, Rosedale oversees 1.3 million residents of Second Life's 3-D, online world of commerce, information and social networking.

And Second Life could be headed for Next Big Thing status.

Think of it as MySpace meets "The Matrix," where players create alternative reality versions of themselves and then live out their new, digital lives online. They make and visit friends, have sex and get married. They can build a house, test drive a car or buy virtual goods for actual money.

Residents of Second Life craft elaborate avatars—or animated alter egos—and spend Linden dollars (L257 = \$1 U.S.) to outfit themselves with designer outfits, cars and associated bling to live this alternate lifestyle.

Hundreds of thousands of real dollars (as of Sunday evening, \$603,606 in the previous 24 hours) get spent every day among



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and buildings for Second Life clients.

Joining Second Life is free, though the cost of building objects and buying land varies. A small, 16-acre island will set entrepreneurs back \$1,250, plus a monthly maintenance fee of \$195. Large islands run \$5,000, plus \$780 monthly, though more affordable plans exist for inland lots.

The population of registered users is booming, growing by 30 percent a month, and Second Life passed the million-user mark last month.

"Second Life looks like the statistical average of all our dreams," says Rosedale, 38, an intense but soft-speaking San Diego native.

"In-world," as they say here, he's "Philip Linden," an urban cowboy punk. In real life, he's an entrepreneur who has attracted some of the biggest names in the online world as investors.

26,000 virtual acres of islands, casinos, shopping districts, libraries, universities—even sex clubs. Entrepreneurs with virtual shops earn real money designing software, clothes

and buildings for Second Life clients. In the past few months, companies such as Sony BMG, Nissan and Adidas/Reebok have rushed to establish corporate beachheads on Second Life, founded in 2003. Wes Keltner, president and CEO of The Ad Option, helped American Apparel set up its own island and is presently designing a virtual version of Times Square. This fall, Harvard Law School offered a class taught partially on its Second Life virtual campus.

But the implications of interactive worlds like Second Life reach beyond the Internet. Residents can make money and retain intellectual property rights to their creations, as long as they adhere to user agreements.

"For us, it's a whole new medium," says Jeff Yapp, executive vice president of MTV Networks' Music Group.

In September, MTV launched its own Virtual Laguna Beach, a sandy 3-D space akin to Second Life and Sims Online, based on its show "Laguna Beach."

But Second Life isn't TV, nor is it a video game, Rosedale says. Unlike video games, there is no singular objective, no princesses in distress, no alien bad guys to slaughter wholesale.

So why do people choose to spend so much time and even money living a digital life >>