

Internet In Our Lives

Virtual Worlds: Unique, Interactive Communities

(NAPSA)—Live in the Midwest but want to hit the beach? Itching to go exploring but hindered by the price of gas? Interested in meeting new friends from around the world but not sure how to start? Surprisingly, it's possible to make these and many other dreams come true—without leaving the comfort of your own home.

Over the last few years, people have done this millions of times over. Thanks to the Internet, there's an infinite number of destinations—with parties, games, travel hot spots and lots of new friends—in virtual worlds. And while socializing with friends in a virtual world is a popular pastime among teens, people of all ages are flocking to them to escape the daily grind, meet new people and try out new personae.

What Is A Virtual World?

A virtual world is a computer-based environment for its members to inhabit and interact in. During registration, you'll create an "avatar," which is an online version of yourself for getting around the virtual world. Virtual worlds are often in 3-D and may look similar to the real world, or they may depict fantasy environments. Communicating with other members is easy—in most cases you can just type, but you can also "spice it up" with things like graphical icons, visual gestures, voice chat or even video or music clips that express what you want to say.

While some virtual worlds are more like 3-D games (commonly known as massively multiplayer online role-playing games), there are many different kinds: Some are focused on business applica-



Photo credit: Virtual World There.com

Virtual worlds give people the opportunity to interact and explore, without leaving home.

tions, while others are for socializing, and some cater to certain demographics, like children or adults. Each virtual world has a unique community with its own rules, economy, members and culture.

One popular destination, There.com, is a social virtual world where people can communicate and develop personal relationships through shared online experiences. The site provides endless ways for its members to participate and express themselves. They can join clubs; play cards or paintball; compete in buggy races; or even make clothes and other goods for themselves or to sell to others.

The site's state-of-the-art virtual worlds platform provides a user-friendly experience—beginners don't need a computer science degree to quickly get up and running—and it works on a dial-up Internet connection. Better still, it's a PG-13 world—safe for all users age 13 and up.

To learn more or to begin exploring this virtual world, visit www.there.com/NAPS.