

# A Second Life in a Virtual World

**B**ack in the early 1990s, author Neal Stephenson coined the term 'metaverse' for his sci-fi novel Snow Crash. It represented Stephenson's vision of how a virtual reality-based Internet might evolve in early 21st century. In the book, inhabitants of a virtual world can create an online persona and live out their fantasies in a virtual environment. Today's new breed of 'virtual world' websites have brought this concept to life.

**Social networking really took off in 2006, with sites like YouTube and MySpace becoming household names almost overnight. But the latest craze to hit the digital superhighway takes the whole social networking idea a stage further. Websites such as Habbo Hotel and Second Life combine social networking and role play, allowing users to adopt an online personality and lifestyle within the relative safety of a virtual world.**

**Second Life was developed by US software firm Linden Lab. It is a sophisticated 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its residents. Since opening to the public in 2003, it's 'population' has grown to 2,854,845 inhabitants from around the globe.**

**Habbo Hotel attracts around 7 million users each month, typically a younger audience than the Second Life demographic. Again, users can create 'habbos' – digital versions of themselves which they can personalise.**

**It's no surprise to find that big brands have already established themselves in the virtual scene, with companies like Adidas and**

**Reebok setting up their own virtual stores on Second Life. An advert for a new Audi model was premiered on Second Life before it hit the real world. It's estimated that Second Life is turning over around £250,000 per day.**

**Habbo Hotel attracted attention from the music media when cartoon band Gorillaz used it to help promote their second album, triggering a flurry of activity from other acts keen to jump onto the virtual bandwagon. McFly, Lily Allen, and Akon have all made appearances in Habbo Hotel whilst Second Life residents have enjoyed virtual concerts from the likes of Suzanne Vega and Ben Folds. Even Duran Duran are poised to take over an island for a gig next month...**

