

# Google

## May Launch Virtual World

Last week we published an article focusing on 'virtual world' websites such as Second Life and Habbo Hotel. Now this week rumours are rife that Google plan to launch their own virtual world offering – a Google-engineered "metaverse" which industry experts are already referring to as a "world game."

The metaverse would use real-world data gathered from Google's existing properties to craft the alternate online platform. Google are rumoured to be looking at ways to tap into the expanding world of in-game advertising, following Microsoft's 2006 purchase of Massive – a company specialising in in-game adverts for publishers and advertisers. Apparently Google are in discussion with in-game ad company AdScape as they prepare to monetize their virtual world format.

Word has it that Google have approached a company in China to design avatars whilst an internal team have been charged with the task of creating the metaverse itself, utilising a team of experts previously with There.com - another online virtual world website.

It is thought the technology will spring from a current Google product called SketchUp. Used to design 3D models that can be layered onto Google Earth images, skilled developers can use the SketchUp 3D modeling software to make the Google Earth images as lifelike as possible - like adding texture to buildings.

The whole issue of in-game advertising is one that is hotly debated by gamers on numerous online forums. One contributor summed up as follows: "You haven't stopped going to the cinema because there might be product placement in a film. If it does happen it'll be like everything else - certain publishers/designers will hold onto their integrity and others who probably had none in the first place will sell out even further."

