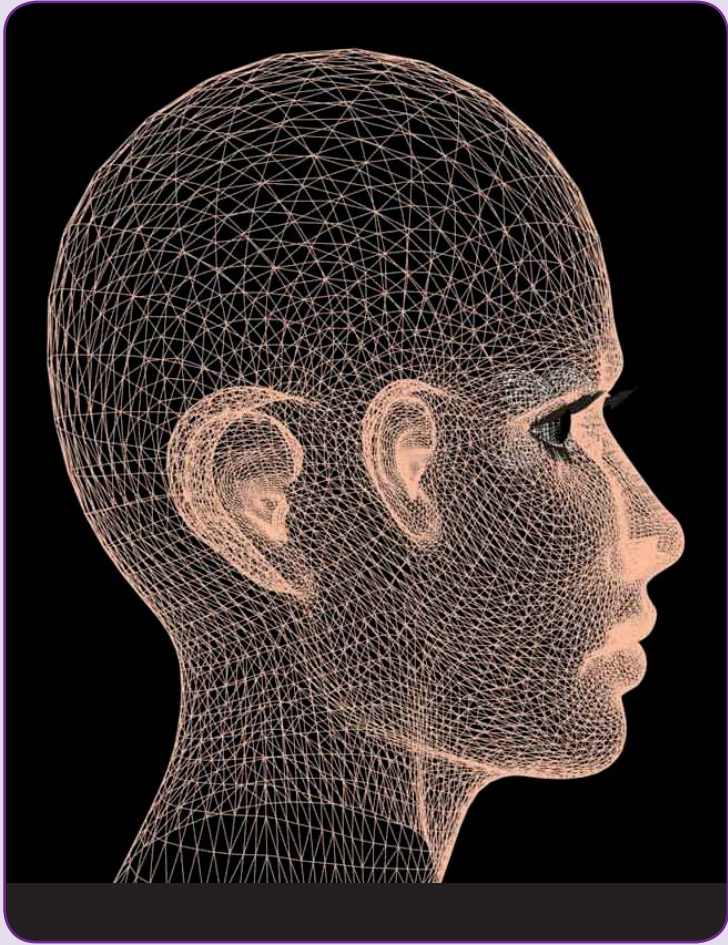


Have You Got a Virtual Life Yet?



According to recent studies, 80% of us will be leading 'virtual lives' in 4 years time – a second life lived out through the online world. It's already an area that's growing steadily and it's no surprise to learn marketers are gleefully rubbing their hands in anticipation as they ponder the opportunities to sell to this captive audience.

Astute marketers will indeed already be watching the development of the online virtual world phenomenon with a view to investigating this channel. Currently the general consensus is that the environment needs to stabilize, although it's clear the virtual environment will continue to grow, offering many future opportunities particularly within niche markets.

A recent report published by Gartner indicates several laws which any business should keep in mind if considering stepping into virtual territory. Firstly, virtual world websites should not be regarded as games. Any advertising that takes place in the virtual environment should be relevant and add value to the user – and marketers should remember that behind every avatar lies a real person. The report also acknowledges the virtual world is still somewhat uncharted territory.

Indeed, there is some question over just how popular these virtual world websites really are. Statistics suggest that, although many have accessed virtual worlds, genuinely active users are considerably fewer than some reports have indicated in the past. The population of online worlds may therefore be relatively small – particularly when compared to online gaming sites that encourage multi-users for example.

That said, it's an area which online marketers will be watching closely in the years to come.

www.businessinberkshire.co.uk/pconlinegaming