



*Buford Philbin is one of the paid staff members who greet visitors of Manpower Island. Twenty volunteers from all over the world, representing a variety of professions, generations and cultures, work alongside staff.*

# POWER OF COLLABORATION: MANPOWER'S FIRST ANNIVERSARY IN SECOND LIFE

By Rita J. King

Of Manpower's 4,500 global offices, the one in Second Life, which celebrated its first anniversary on July 14, 2008, is arguably the most unique and certainly the most unexpected—at least at first glance. In every other Manpower office around the world, physical people from the local community come in seeking new skills and opportunities for employment. In Second Life, the local community is a virtual one inhabited by an increasing number of avatars, which are creations of real people who live all over the world. Thousands of people have visited Manpower's local office in Second Life: sometimes they wear business suits or wings, halos, horns or smokestacks on their heads; sometimes they are "newbies" with no idea what comes next—where to

get a skin or a shape, how to communicate, much less to communicate or join a community. But they are still people, operating their keyboards somewhere, and they are looking for employment advice.

Manpower's goal in Second Life is the same as in the physical world—to be the company that helps individuals, companies and governments understand what's coming next in the changing world of work. It is predicted that by 2011, 80 percent of all internet users and Fortune 500 Companies will have "some form of a second life, although not necessarily in Second Life."<sup>1</sup> Club Penguin, one of countless virtual worlds for children, currently has 700,000 paid subscribers and 12 million registered users. In June 2008, Mattel revealed that Barbie Girls Virtual World

<sup>1</sup> Analysts Identify the Five Laws for Virtual Worlds During Gartner Symposium/ITxpo 2007 Emerging Trends

has 13 million registered users. Clearly, tomorrow's workforce is already working and living in virtual platforms today.

"There's strong evidence that this medium has the potential to fill a gap in the world of work," said Tammy Johns, Manpower Inc. Senior Vice President Global Workforce Strategy, "but it is not without limitations." As a result, Manpower treats exploration in virtual worlds like a focused foray into an emerging market that hasn't yet formalized by focusing specifically on real issues related to the world of work.

Dan Darrow, Manpower Virtual Worlds Liaison said, "If you build something that no one needs, no one will visit. You can have the best technology on your sim, and it might be visually beautiful, but if it's not useful, then it isn't relevant. The reason people leave Manpower Island with a good feeling is because we are there to greet them and help them navigate this virtual world. It would be foolish to assume that first-time visitors would know what to do in Second Life, with out anyone to help them maneuver."

With global expertise in 80 labor markets, Manpower has witnessed the emergence of various economies over six decades in business. All emerging economies seek to put in place a healthy formal labor market and virtual worlds should be no different. "The lack

of such protection leaves residents of virtual worlds exposed," Johns said.

A significant part of Darrow's job is interacting with visitors to Manpower's local headquarters. If he isn't there in person to greet potential clients or answer questions for current partners and collaborators, he or another member of the team can be summoned by a bell, across time zones, from the physical realm to the virtual as easily as checking email or answering the phone.

Manpower Inc. Chairman and CEO Jeff Joerres said, "We know that there are many trap doors and blind alleys, but virtual worlds are morphing into something that will become very productive, and an integral part of how companies get work done."

Manpower's leadership in virtual worlds is in keeping with the company's history of translating changing work trends into practical training programs designed to prepare people for work in new environments. The difference, however, is that none of these developments came with their own inherent economy, and none contained the option of choosing to look like a bunny, or an expectation of anonymity, which makes the development of infrastructure around virtual worlds even more of a challenge. Anonymity is not typical for a functioning employment



*Manpower Inc. Senior Vice President Global Workforce Strategy, Tammy Johns (Alexa Tammis), said the company's exploration of the Metaverse is being conducted with the same focus as it would be in any emerging labor market.*



*Dancing Ink Productions Chief Global Strategist Joshua S. Fouts (Schmilsson Nilsson) and Dancing Ink Productions CEO and Creative Director Rita J. King (Eureka Dejavu) dance while working virtually.*

market, as it creates an uncertain degree of associated risk, Johns noted.

It all comes down to trust.

“Providing a safe place for individuals, whether they learn to fly, learn to teleport to other islands, or create avatars that don’t scream ‘newbie;’ is the next step in preparing individuals for such emerging markets – as virtual worlds,” Darrow said. “We help individuals prepare for and navigate the changing world of work; and we are working to attract a new set of candidates. We know this medium attracts tech savvy individuals and people with impressive skills in the visual arts.”

In addition to various other initiatives and campaigns, Manpower spent a year surveying hundreds of residents in Second Life about the world of virtual work.

Respondents included students, mothers looking to re-enter the workforce, retirees, teachers, military police, business consultants, manufacturers, waitresses, dieticians, customer service representatives, a summer camp instructor, software developers, journalists, a doctor, a nurse, a carpenter, a librarian, marketing managers, clothing designers, business strategists,

musicians and an accountant.

The respondents, with an average of nine years of work experience, surprisingly hailed from more than 50 countries and reported speaking more than 40 languages including English, French, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Brazilian Portuguese, Portuguese, Russian, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Dutch, German, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, American Sign Language, Malay, Mandarin, Hokkien, Bislana, South Efate, Croatian, Italian, Finnish, Hungarian, Greek, Gujurati, Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Galician, Breton, Turkish and Thai.

The employees that provide service on the Manpower Island are multilingual, with fluency in English, Spanish and Portuguese, and use Babblar, a translation device that allows conversation to be instantly translated to ten languages, with visitors who don’t speak English.

“We know it’s not perfect,” said Darrow. “It’s just a text translation program. But at least both parties understand each other, and it’s apparent that people are happy when we give it a shot.”

Beyond creating a safe learning environment, twenty volunteers from all around the world, from

various fields, all ages and myriad nationalities are often on Manpower Island to provide additional help and guidance. The most popular question asked by those who visit the site is: *How can I get a job in a virtual world??*

"The interesting thing is that many people arrive on Manpower Island not even necessarily knowing that it's possible to find work in a virtual world—they just know that they don't have any Linden dollars (the currency used in Second Life) and they realize that they need some," Darrow said. "We have various resources to help them in this process, and we also offered them 400 Linden dollars in exchange for their opinions and feedback related to real and virtual work. Our goal is to help individuals find meaningful ways to utilize their skills in Second Life."

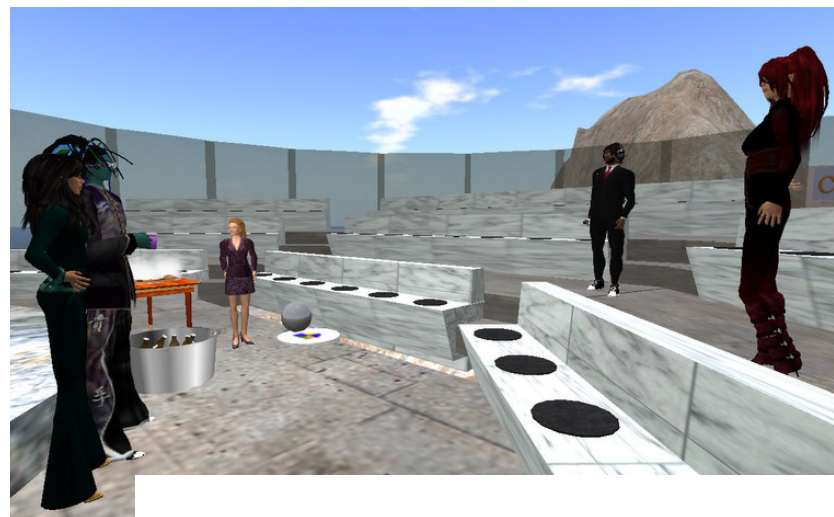
"The thousands of people who have visited Manpower Island are on the journey with us to explore work in virtual worlds," said Johns. "This is a Christopher Columbus exploration and adventure. Each time you go deeper inland, you learn more. At first, virtual worlds were viewed as an escape, but now many people have expressed that they are taking it seriously. Manpower is not in virtual worlds to force commercialization. As new forms of collaboration emerge, we want to be in a position to answer the question: How will this technology impact the world of work?"

One key discovery gleaned from Manpower's global presence is the fact that cultural customs and habits critical to business relationships can be replicated in three dimensions. Multiculturalism, a driving force behind many of the global shifts taking place in the world of work, can be understood in a new way by watching how avatars interact. Because there's no threat of physical discomfort, much less violence, practicing cultural sensitivity has taken on a new depth in virtual worlds. While many groups tend to segregate themselves based on cultural and linguistic barriers, just as in the physical world, those who want to explore are far less afraid to do so.

"Patterns of physical interaction in the real world

carry over into the virtual world," said Dancing Ink Productions Chief Global Strategist Joshua S. Fouts, who has lived and worked in Brazil on and off throughout the last twenty years. "In a 2006 report by Nicolas Yee, he found that distance between avatars emulated the same distance that you would find between men and women in the United States. So I went into a Brazilian community, which I know to have a much shorter non-verbal comfort zone than North Americans do. I found that the majority of non-verbal interactions between Brazilian avatars are significantly closer and certainly out of the comfort zone of what it would be for Americans, but well within the Brazilian comfort zone."

Avatars bring their local cultures from the physical world with them, but nevertheless interact within a constantly evolving, brand new culture that has its own values and customs. The business value of understanding this burgeoning global dynamic is significant and has implications across many sectors, including the often complex process of outsourcing.



*A global team of collaborators from the United States, Germany and Australia included BJORLYN LOON of the in-world talk show Metanomics, machinimist Draxtor Despres and SLCN executive producer Starr Sonic. Scottish builder Toran Cult, not pictured, worked on an immersive venue for Manpower's First Anniversary Celebration in Second Life on July 14, 2008.*



*People from all over the world have taken up residence in the Metaverse. Thousands of visitors from 50 countries have visited Manpower Island to seek work, adjust to an immersive platform and share their thoughts and experiences.*

“I don’t want to say it is life-changing,” Darrow said, “but it really is. Once people have that experience, it changes the way they see work. It gives you the experience of being with someone. After a while, I feel that I am that person, embodied in that space. It’s not just about people who are comfortable in that space, because anybody can be if they’re set up for it, which was the original idea behind our launch a year ago—to help newbies prepare for this new world. It presents the ability for brains to connect to brains and souls to connect to souls, but without all the other stuff that can get in the way—race, gender, age... And that’s why Manpower does so well here. The company has been looking at ways to overcome such issues for a long time.”

When Manpower Island’s sandbox was created, it was with one question in mind:

Would immersion in a virtual world increase access to talent, innovation and improve productivity?

“A wonderful benefit has been that we can access the talent of those we could not access in the physical world as easily—particularly those with physical disabilities,” Johns said.

Manpower’s mission for 60 years has been to act as an

agent of powerful change both locally and globally —by responding to the needs of the local community with a training emphasis for the creation of truly marketable skills, while maintaining a global reach that has helped to affect positive change<sup>2</sup>. That mission is strong across all of the company’s offices, no less so in Second Life.

Second Life offers unique opportunities for deepening many of Manpower’s long-standing initiatives, such as widening the depth and breadth of opportunities for a broader pool of talent, including refugees and those who have been affected by disasters or physical disabilities. Second Life contains a thriving community of individuals with various disabilities, creatively working for significant workplace enhancement through virtual technology.

Gentle Heron (Alice Krueger) is afflicted with multiple sclerosis and cannot stand unaided. Walking, swimming, horseback riding—all of these “fabulous things” that she cannot do in real life, Heron can do in Second Life. As powerful as these experiences are, it isn’t just about moving through a new world in an avatar’s body. Heron has seen herself and others go through deeply personal, and sometimes professional,

<sup>2</sup> From Manpower Inc. Chairman and CEO Jeffrey A. Joerres’ introductory remarks to the company’s Social Responsibility Report, “Take a Look Around,” published in 2006 after the company became a signatory of the United Nations Global Compact. This report details the company’s commitment to four critical areas: Workforce Development, Disaster Recovery, Reaching Out to Refugees and Combating Human Trafficking.

transformations. The Heron Sanctuary is a support group for people with disabilities who were unable to find such a community in real life only to find that Second Life also lacked such a group. So they created it. The success of the Sanctuary is represented by its pink and white trees that were planted by a group member who had such a debilitating social anxiety disorder when she first joined that she was unable to interact with people. Working with plants enabled her to gather self-confidence until she eventually approached Heron with a request to help her create a resume.

"We outlined all of the skills she gained in Second Life," said Heron, "and she actually managed to get a job in real life as a result of her Second Life skills. I am so proud of her."

"What we've learned," said Johns, "is that people in virtual worlds have skills that have been developed and grown from a social and personal perspective that can evolve into real life job skills. The flexibility that is created by virtual worlds allows people of certain demographics, such as women, students and retirees to work on more flexible terms."

### VIDEO GAME USE AMONG MANPOWER SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- 69.3% of residents play video games
- Those who play video games play an average of 10.3 hours per week (range 0.5-60 hours per week)
- Average hours per week of those who used Second Life in 2007 = 21.5 hours (159 residents, range 1-130 hours)  
Projected average hours per week of those using Second Life in 2008 = 23 hours (335 residents, range 0-200 hours)
- 43% of residents own one or more video game consoles

## THE FUN FACTOR

"I would prefer to get paid in real money," one Manpower survey respondent replied. "The reason for this is the devaluation of a user's time versus work accomplished within a virtual environment. What people would normally be paid a few hundred dollars for in real life, they often accept a fraction of in the Linden dollars equivalent. That bothers me on a sociological level."

It won't take long, predicts Linden Lab Founder and Chairman Philip Rosedale, before this changes. In the beginning, it's partly the "fun factor" that leads people to devalue their time. Even this, however, seems likely to be a temporary effect.

"Before long, there will be an environment in which people will charge a well-established rate for their services," said Rosedale. "This is happening already." Linden Lab has 275 employees working virtually in five global offices including one in Singapore and another in Australia.

"The benefits of virtual work are limited only by time zone problems," he said.

By the end of our discussion, Philip Linden, in denim chaps, a tee-shirt with red lips and spiky hair, was talking about the development of a 24 hour work flow that goes around the globe and comes back every day. Such trends will be unique to the mindset of a new generation of workers.

"When it comes to the Net Generation, they are wired differently, they are confident with technology, and they operate in different social environments," said Johns.<sup>3</sup>

Other hallmark qualities of a new generation include a preference for working collaboratively, which has distinct advantages and yet requires some getting used to. The Net Gens will force employers to rethink management. Members of this generation are accustomed to being able to express themselves, and won't want to work in a hierarchical environment. This generation has an unprecedented capacity to

<sup>3</sup>Manpower Inc. is an official sponsor of The Economist's debate on Workforce Talent 2020. Tammy Johns was interviewed in July 2008.

harness its own creative power to make significant changes in society.

"As technology continues to evolve, two core questions will arise," Johns noted. "First, will education prepare people adequately for this fast-changing technology? Second, in ageing countries where they are not replacing the population fast enough, where will they find core workers for much-needed jobs in the trades, and so on? The challenge will be to find ways to keep older workers in the workforce longer in an effort to hedge the pending talent crunch."

*Manpower Inc., a world leader in the employment services industry, creates and delivers services that enable its clients to win in the changing world of work. The \$21 billion company has a worldwide network of 4,500 offices in 80 countries (including five new countries in the Middle East) territories and Second Life to meet the diverse needs of over 400,000 clients per year.*

*In following the patterns of "Talent Mobility,"<sup>4</sup> Manpower has identified two main types of reactions by employers and the government to technological advances and subsequent shifts in the labor market:*

- *Tactical, reactive and generally defensive*
- *Fact-based and firmly focused on the future supply and demand of labor.*

*One issue on which respondents unanimously agreed: flexibility is a mandatory requirement for employment. The desire for flexibility is nothing new, but true integration of work and life are more attainable now because of virtual work. Johns explains why:*

*"Virtual worlds have the potential to provide a greater reach to talent and borderless access to people anywhere in the world; virtual worlds provide individual and organizational productivity improvement and allow organizations to reconstruct jobs, providing critical flexibility and saving people travel time to and from an office; virtual worlds allow access to innovation at reduced cost and reduced risk, which allows people to create a business model, trial it in a virtual world and then gather the wisdom of crowds before taking the solution to the physical world."*

*Survey respondents had a lot to say on the subject of flexibility:*

- *"I want to be available to my children."*
- *"I prefer to seek a balance between home and family."*
- *"I love variety, the freedom to be creative and inventive, to problem-solve."*
- *"I expect understanding that I'm a human being and not a machine."*
- *"I find that my most creative and innovative side comes from flexibility."*
- *"I'm young and I have no need to stay were I live today."*

#### **AVERAGE AGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS:**

18 - 24 = 39.6%  
25 - 34 = 38.7%  
35 - 44 = 14.7%  
45 - 54 = 5.4%  
55 + = 1.3%

<sup>4</sup>The Borderless Workforce 2008, a white paper published by Manpower Inc. that includes research conducted across 27 countries and territories. The report includes a detailed analysis of the "Talent Mobility Dynamic" for both white and blue collar jobs, a list of the top ten jobs that employers globally are filling with foreign talent and outlines strategies for companies to develop plans to fill critical roles and understand migration and reverse migration patterns.



SL Job Seekers and SL Employees

RL Job Seekers preparing for an interview in SL

Current and Potential SL employers

Current RL employers



*In addition to other campaigns and initiatives, Manpower offered a survey on the world of virtual work to visitors who wanted to earn Linden, the local currency of Second Life, by sharing their perspectives.*

## AN AGENT OF POWERFUL CHANGE

Like experimentation with immersive three-dimensional platforms, the practice of ethics in business does not have an established or conventional standard by which the return on investment can be instantly measured, but full engagement with both critical areas is increasingly necessary for success on both the local and global levels.

Manpower is focused on four key areas of corporate social responsibility: workforce development, disaster recovery, reaching out to refugees and combating human trafficking. The company is also a signatory of the United Nations Global Compact, which requires participants to report back on their practices.<sup>5</sup>

"I truly welcome Manpower's engagement,"

Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact Georg Kell told Dancing Ink Productions during special remarks recorded in Second Life by machinist Draxtor Despres to celebrate Manpower's first year in Second Life. " <sup>6</sup> For a company such as Manpower, the Global Compact is especially relevant. Manpower understands the need to have an ethical framework. I applaud Manpower's efforts in this regard."

One of Manpower's focus areas—disaster relief—is familiar to me. I spent six months researching and investigating a report on post-Katrina corporate profiteering. I interviewed countless workers and employers, and common themes of injustice

<sup>5</sup> Manpower Inc. is a partner of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its campaign, [ninemillion.org](http://ninemillion.org), to provide education to the nine million refugee children exiled around the world.

<sup>6</sup> On July 14, 2008, an event was produced by Dancing Ink Productions for Manpower's First Anniversary Celebration in Second Life. It was groundbreaking in that it was broadcast live from Second Life by Metanomics and SLCN in-world and to a live global internet audience, who could watch live at Metanomics' website and communicate in live chat, in real time, with avatars in Second Life. The Second Life team that worked on Manpower's event included international Manpower executives and consultants, Americans on both coasts and in between, as well as global collaborators Toran Cult (a Scottish builder and scripter), Bernhard Drax (a German machinist living in California) and Starr Sonic, an Australian broadcaster.



*(Left to Right) Manpower Inc. Virtual World Liaison Dan Darrow (Horatio Decosta) and Manpower Inc. CEO Jeff Joerres (Jef Decosta) meet at Manpower Island.*

continuously arose. Labor markets can shift significantly in the wake of war and natural disaster, both of which are currently significant global dynamics. Careers can be shattered, businesses destroyed, infrastructure damaged beyond repair. And what happens in one region doesn't just remain neatly within geographical borders, just as what happens in Second Life doesn't end when one logs out. Patterns develop along with disruptions or changes in the labor market. The stabilizing effect of virtual work lies partly in the fact that if physical infrastructure is destroyed, one's work has the potential to continue, even if one is relocated during a crisis.

Manpower has "developed meaningful ethical business practices, making them the true standouts within their industry," said Alexander Brigham, executive director of Ethisphere Institute. "They go well beyond legal minimums, opting instead to focus on innovative ideas that contribute to the public well being. By their actions, they are forcing their competitors to follow suit or fall behind, and embodying the notion that ethical business practices are more profitable in the long run."

Manpower's commitment to "being a responsible and contributing member of society in each of the

communities in which it operates"<sup>8</sup> includes an evolving community in Second Life, where the company celebrates its commitment to the local culture and global values about which Manpower is passionate: people, knowledge and innovation.

"The commitment to social responsibility is an essential aspect of the Manpower group of companies," said Joerres. "By remaining at the forefront of sweeping developments in the world of work, we believe we're uniquely qualified to help individuals by providing the expertise and resources they need to achieve their personal goals."

Increased transparency through technology allows companies to help more people, according to Charles "Chuck" Bartels, Manpower Inc. Director of Global Social Responsibility and Knowledge Sharing.

"More people have access to knowledge about the workplace and have the ability to get at parts of the workplace they may never have been able to get at before," Bartels said. People are willing to move in the so-called real world for work opportunities sometimes, he added, for just the straight benefit of work itself, but other times, just for the benefit of working in a different environment.

<sup>7</sup> Comment made on June 3, 2008, when Manpower was honored as one of the Ethisphere Institute's "World's Most Ethical Companies." Ethisphere (in partnership with Forbes for the award) is a think-tank dedicated to the research and promotion of profitable best practices in global governance, business ethics, compliance and corporate responsibility.

<sup>8</sup> Manpower's Corporate Social Responsibility Report, "Take a Look Around."

"I wonder how that's all going to work out in Second Life," he said. "It seems to me that it is a different kind of move that would be interesting to pursue—through the utilization of technology."

Helping individuals navigate the changing world of work is embedded in Manpower's DNA. The company is clearly defining this virtual frontier. The past year was just the beginning of an exciting journey.

This report was written by Rita J. King, the CEO and Creative Director of Dancing Ink Productions ([www.eurekadejavu.com](http://www.eurekadejavu.com)) LLC, with assistance and funding from Manpower Inc. ([www.manpower.com](http://www.manpower.com)). It was a collaborative effort with Dancing Ink Productions Chief Global Strategist Joshua S. Fouts, Manpower Inc. Senior Vice President Global Workforce Strategy Tammy Johns, Manpower Inc. Virtual Worlds Liaison Dan Darrow, and Manpower Inc. Executive Management Projects Manager Britt Zarling.



Dancing Ink Productions