

## **GROUP DISCUSSION NOTES – GROUP A**

### **MC2 SIG on Virtual Consumerism 12.1.2006**

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#### **Point 1: Legal issues**

The group thought that researching legal issues related to virtual property would be a very important area. The legal situation needs to be clarified before virtual world economies can mature as sustainable businesses. End-user licence agreements ('EULA') are currently used to attribute rights between involved parties, but in some countries even specific legislation on virtual property is emerging.

For businesses it would be important to understand the limitations and obligations related to virtual property, for example in cases when a virtual world is to be altered or discontinued, or when the operator wishes to terminate accounts in which players have invested a lot of money.

Clarification of the legal situation is also important before third parties can start businesses in virtual worlds. Current EULAs are probably based on the typical "eliminate all liabilities" policy, and they do not consider potential possibilities that more open EULAs could provide for the world and for the operator, specifically in relation to third parties.

#### **Point 2: Virtual services**

There was some discussion on the leveling and bodyguarding services, which are currently the most common forms of "virtual services". A matchmaking service was introduced for lowering the difficulty of breaking social barriers in a game. There was also a nice example of a serious play type of useful "grinding": training real doctors in Star Wars Galaxies to detect real cancer from scan images. Apparently the experiment had been encouraging.

#### **Point 3: Leveling - dominant design**

Richard Bartle has defined classical player types, which derive from player motivation. Vili Lehdonvirta described a revised categorization in his presentation. In our discussion a point of view emerged that if gaming in the virtual world is based on leveling, other motives of play tend to become secondary. Thus it would be worth considering MMORPG designs where leveling is a less dominant mechanic.

**Point 4: RMT in virtual worlds**

We discussed whether there is some threshold after which real-money trade will start in a virtual world, or what are the parameters that influence real-money trade. The conclusions of this discussion could be summarised as follows: “Real-money trade emerges in a virtual world if grinding is agony”. Thus it was thought that the difficulty of achieving something in a virtual world is the driving force for RMT. On the other hand, Habbo Hotel seems to provide a counter-example.

**Closing remarks**

This document describes only a fraction of the ideas discussed during the lively conversations. Thanks for all the participants for sharing their thoughts and helping us shape HIIT’s future research agenda in this field.