Scholarship @ R.I.T.

The RIT Faculty Scholars Series
The Value of Online Social Networks: A Business Perspective

Drs. Victor Perotti and Neil Hair were welcomed to the RIT Libraries’ Idea Factory on September 27, 2007, to speak on “The Value of Online Social Networks: A Business Perspective.” Popular social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, are experiencing phenomenal growth. Thousands of first-year students joined RIT-related Facebook groups before they even arrived on campus this fall quarter.

Each time Facebook or MySpace is purchased, its value increases dramatically; Facebook was recently valued at $10 billion. However, business research into the value of social networking is lacking.

Perotti and Hair, of the Saunders COB, recently conducted a qualitative online study using their Facebook contacts. The study began with 43 requests for participants to see how users derive value from their social computing activity. Within six hours, they had over 500 replies from RIT students. The study’s users reported on their favorite features and activities, ranging from managing contacts to sending messages to online dating.

The responses demonstrated that financial gain is not found in online social network advertising, since users typically ignore ads or find them to be intrusive. Users themselves are the most effective marketers. Additionally, results showed that business to business applications may also be profitable, as well as market research.

Perotti and Hair intend to study the effectiveness of various social networks and to conduct an in-depth study using Personal Construct Theory. To learn more about their research, visit http://www.neilhair.com/ or join their digital entrepreneurship group at http://digent.rit.edu.

IN THIS ISSUE
There are articles on: online social networks, virtual theatre, worldwide scholarship, online teaching tips, designing experiments, itinerant teachers of the Deaf, redundant publication pitfalls, student-designed sustainable homes, design in Denmark, HRD Fulbright scholars, RIT’s new legal counsel, political prudence and neuroscience, international business misconceptions, a CIAS open access journal, critical care skills, a Professor Emeritus Lulu book, and an award-winning RIT dissertation.

“There are no foolish questions and no man [or woman] becomes a fool until he [or she] has stopped asking questions.”
—Charles P. Steinmetz
Imagine a live theatrical performance. However, imagine rather than having to go out to a physical theatre, you can be at home and experience the action in a virtual world: the actors are all avatars, the sets and lights are virtual; and the show is viewed on a computer screen and performed live by people located all around the globe.

Is it possible to enable this kind of theatrical experience, and if so, how would the experience compare to a show on a real stage? These are some of the questions that are being explored by Joe Geigel (Computer Science) and Marla Schweppe (Design) as part of the Virtual Theatre project, a collaborative effort between the department of Computer Science (GCCIS) and the School of Design (CIAS).

Funded by a three year grant from the National Science Foundation, Joe and Marla, along with their colleagues, Walter Wolf (Computer Science), and Tina Chapman DaCosta (NSSA), will set out to create theatre in 3D virtual space, where actors, crew, and audience share and participate in a single theatrical experience over the Internet. A variety of virtual reality devices are employed in controlling the actors, props, and lighting on the virtual stage, including a full body motion capture system.

In addition to the research aspects of the project, Virtual Theatre serves as a means of exploring collaborative education. The project has been incorporated into the existing curriculum, allowing for firsthand student involvement in the required research of the project. Students from both Computer Science and Design create the technical and aesthetic elements necessary to realize the performance. This classroom experience introduces students to the kind of interaction between artists and technologists that is essential in many industries involving graphics and electronic entertainment (e.g. visualization, special effects, computer animation, and games).

More information on the Virtual Theatre project, along with a list of recent publications, can be found at http://www.cs.rit.edu/~jmg/vtheatre.html.

Joe Geigel / Computer Science