



LEO J. SHAPIRO & ASSOCIATES LLC.

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## The New Migration: Virtual Environment Provides Hope

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How does one bring about social change?

Is it by protesting, lobbying, marching, or something else? In many cases, the best way to create change in any environment is by leaving it. Much like the mass migration of the Swedes in the early nineteenth century, only when mass groups of people migrate away from negative situations does the situation itself improve.

So, where are the disgruntled people of the modern world heading?

To their computer, of course. And at the forefront of this new virtual society is the internet-based juggernaut, Second Life.

Boasting some seven million users, Second Life has transformed the idea of a virtual world and is raking in the profits and success from it. Starting in 2003, the free-for-download program allows users to create their own avatar, operate in virtual worlds that are only a quick teleport away, build their own homes, cars, and whatever else they can think up, and buy possessions for their avatars using a currency called "Linden dollars."

Leo J. Shapiro & Associates (LJS), using its more than 50 years of market research experience as a back drop, set out to find what draws people to this new environment, what they would like to see changed, and if situations in their first life draw them to this world.

The data was collected from March-April 2007 in Second Life and consisted of 164 completed surveys. The data is also compared to the LJS National Poll, a nationally representative telephone opinion study, conducted during the same months as the Second Life study.

LJS found the majority of the respondents had been on Second Life for one to two months (30%), followed closely by "less than one month" (26%). This was not surprising because, according to data provided by secondlife.com, 2,832,934 new users had joined since LJS had entered Second Life.

The majority of Second Life residents spend more than 20 hours in the program during a normal seven-day week (39%). The average amount of time actually ended up being 24.8 hours even though many respondents were "scared to admit it."

The main complaint about Second Life was the lag, or freezing of the program – a full 45% cited it as Second Life’s main problem. The other culprits were Second Life being too expensive (14%), bad landowners (6.7%), and saturation from the many new people joining (6%).

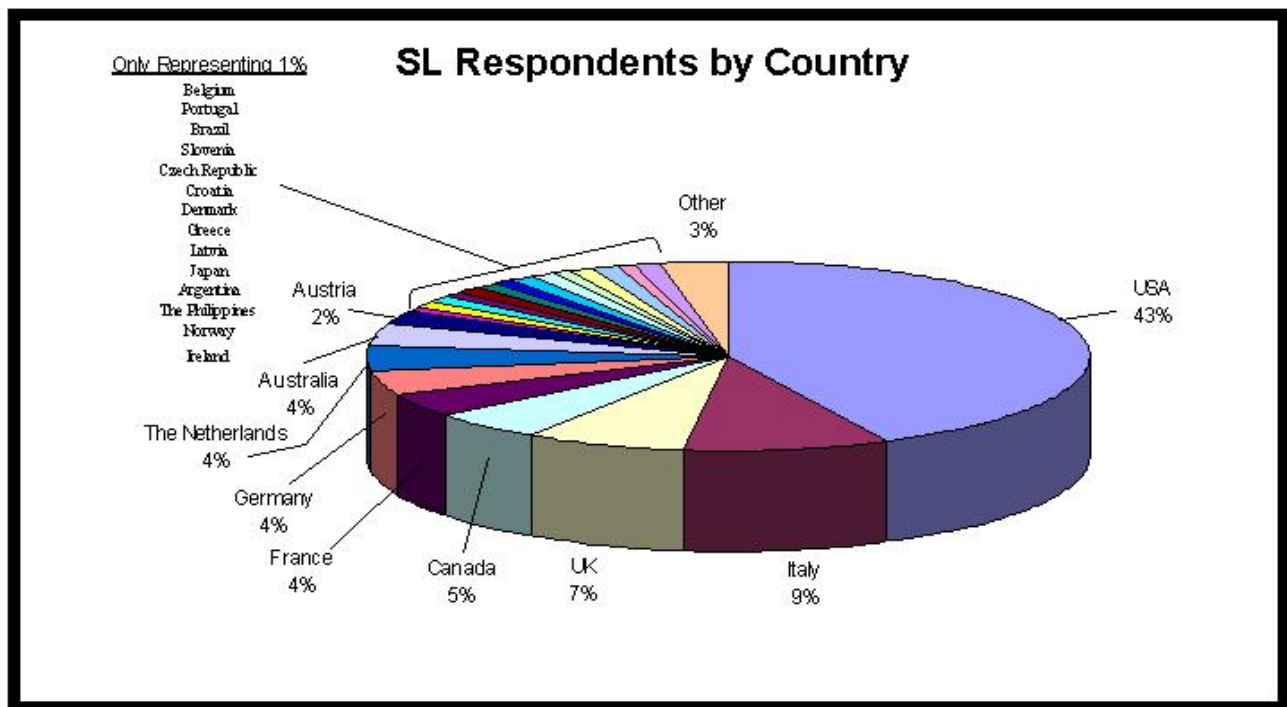
Despite the complaints, the majority of residents felt things were improving inside Second Life: 49.4% felt things were “getting better”, 18% thought things were “getting worse”, and 32% just felt it was about “the same.” A whopping 84% of respondents said they were “pleased with the way things were being run inside Second Life.”

Second Life residents are in the buying mood as well: 54% of respondents feel it is a good time to “make major purchases.” This figure may seem small, but compared to people in the real world that figure is quite high. Only 35% of Americans felt, during this same time period, that it was a good time to make a major purchase.

The average age of Second Life respondents was 30, with the majority coming from the 19-24 age range. The majority of residents were male; only 37% female residents.

The intellectual map of the Second Life world is just as sorted as the real world. When asked the highest grade completed in school, residents replied with 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less (3%), 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> grade (6%), high school graduate (14%), some college (32%), college graduate (27%), and post graduate (15%).

Respondents came from all over the world, but were more likely to come from English speaking countries: USA, UK, and Canada. Even with so many other countries present in Second Life, English remains the most spoken language, making it a necessary prerequisite for migration to the virtual world.



Another point of interest with our respondents is that the majority came from the most prosperous countries in the world. This poses a problem with the society of Second Life because it gives avatars from these countries, much like in real life, a financial advantage that provides them with more opportunities to start and run virtual businesses, stay online longer, have a faster Internet connection, and buy tools that can assist in building creations.

Instead of evening the economic playing field, Second Life merely reinforces the financial dominance of the world's most developed countries.

On the bright side, a lot of things that would cost large amounts of money in real life are next to nothing in Second Life: The company Zero Gravity charges passengers \$3,750 per flight aboard its G-Force One aircraft to experience anti-gravity but Second Life residents can fly all day long for no cost. A British Airways flight from Dublin to Amsterdam will cost a traveler around \$250, but a trip from Virtual Dublin to Virtual Amsterdam is just a click of the mouse. The average cost of driving a car for one year in the United States is around \$6,000 (that's about \$1,700 in gas alone) but in Second Life, virtual highways stretch for miles and cars are so cheap that almost everyone has a one – and they don't need to fill up on gas.

<i>Event</i>	<i>Real Life Cost</i>	<i>Second Life Cost</i>
Experiencing anti-gravity	\$3,750 per flight (aboard Zero Gravity Corporation's G-Force One airplane)	Free
Driving	Around \$1,700 a year in gas alone	Free
Traveling from Dublin to Amsterdam	\$250 (according to British Airways)	Free (to the 'virtual' versions)

In order to get a clearer picture of what the average Second Life user was like, LJS asked questions relating to their happiness in the real world. They didn't pull this idea out of thin air; LJS has been asking the general U.S. population to rate their happiness for several years now.

Compared to the average U.S. population (based on the March 2007 National Poll), Second Life residents in their "first lives" are more likely to be excited or interested in something (86% to 55%), to be proud because someone had complimented them on something they had done (71% to 63%), report "feeling on top of the world" (38% to 32%), and, if only slightly, are happier than the general population (90% to 87%).

Not all is rosy for Second Life residents in real life: They are less likely than the U.S. population to be pleased they had accomplished something (82% to 85%) or feel things are "going their way" (67% to 73%). Second Life residents are more likely to say they were so restless they couldn't sit long in a chair (32% to 26%), feel very lonely or remote from other people (32% to 26%), to be bored (49% to 46%), depressed or unhappy (28% to 23%), and be upset that someone had criticized them (24% to 22%).

<b>Happiness</b>		
<i>Subject</i>	<i>U.S. Population</i>	<i>SL Population</i>
Particularly excited about something	55%	86%
So restless that they can't sit long in a chair	26%	32%
Proud because someone had complemented them on something	63%	71%
Very lonely or remote from other people	26%	32%
Pleased about having accomplished something	73%	67%
Bored	46%	49%
On top of the world	32%	38%
Depressed/unhappy	23%	28%
Things going their way	73%	67%
Upset because someone criticized them	22%	24%

The image LJS was able to see of the average Second Life resident was one that is full of life, easily excited by things, and an early adopter of new ideas. They are frustrated with their first lives and unlikely to feel things are going their way.

They may not be as content in their first lives as the U.S. population, but unlike most of those unhappy Americans, they have found a way out.

The cultural phenomenon of Second Life, and other forms of virtual expressionism are just getting started. Examples of this expressionism are everywhere: personalized profiles in networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, video game systems that let users create avatars (or "Mii's") like the Nintendo Wii, and, of course, virtual worlds like that of Second Life.

The research LJS has started is only the beginning. What will happen when Second Life hits 10 or 20 million residents? The possibilities are endless for business, marketing, branding, and even religion and literature.

In the real world, Second Life residents report they are sometimes lonely or bored, which is higher in comparison to the feelings of regular U.S. residents. Extended periods of time in Second Life may prove detrimental to one's health, in particular, mental health. The strain of spending hours staring at the computer screen is already starting to rear its head into the healthcare industry – one can only imagine the consequences when one million people a week are logging into Second Life. Will long hours on Second Life create vision problems, or even addictions?

More research will be required to see what Second Life residents really want *before* big companies, like NBA basketball and Adidas, seemingly throw piles of cash into virtual wastelands, the inevitable brand wars that will take place on the virtual landscape, and the possibilities that most of us haven't even imagined yet.

The future of Second Life, and similar programs, is bright. The only thing left to do now is predict which way it goes next.

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*Leo J. Shapiro is one of the Nation's leading market research companies. For more information, visit our website at [www.ljs.com](http://www.ljs.com) or contact Phillip Molnar at [phillipm@ljs.com](mailto:phillipm@ljs.com).*