

Play the net game

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Mark Ward – Technology Correspondent, BBC NEWS



Despite its billing as a fundamentally social phenomenon, browsing the web can be a very solitary experience.

Visit a popular website and, although thousands of other people may be using it too, you will get little sense of being part of a crowd.

The only sense you will get is if the site is slow to respond and even that it is just an echo of that greater presence.

But now games are starting to emerge that are explicitly social and use the web as their playing surface. No longer is there any need to venture into an online world such as Azeroth or Hyboria to go on quests, complete missions and go up in level.

Instead, RocketOn, Web Wars Eve and the Passively Multiplayer Online Game (PMOG) let you do it all on the web.

Avatars ahoy

For Steve Hoffman, creator of RocketOn, the impetus for his creation came from a dream.

In his dream Mr Hoffman was browsing the web when suddenly all the people also using the site he was on rose to the surface and started chatting.

The end result of that dream is the RocketOn browser extension, which lets people create an avatar that accompanies them as they travel round the net.

If they visit a site at the same time as another RocketOn user they can stroll across the webpage and chat to that other person via the in-built instant messaging system.

Also, said Mr Hoffman, friends can meet up on one website or can gather to watch a video on another site such as YouTube.

When it launches, Mr Hoffman expects RocketOn to be popular with younger web users whose use of the net is an extension of their social life. It adds, he said, a much needed element of spontaneity to social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Bebo and the like.



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The application is currently in a trial phase. Eventually, Mr Hoffman hopes, players will be able to buy clothes for their avatars from the websites where the virtual people are hanging out.

“It’s a natural extension of where the web is going,” he said