

EventManagerBlog

Virtual Team Building, Does it Work?

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This post is by Anne Thornley-Brown, President, Executive Oasis International, specialists in [team building](#). Anne is @executiveoasis on Twitter. [Meet the rest of the team!](#)

Fully customizable virtual simulations are transforming the team building landscape, breaking down barriers and making it possible for teams at different locations to participate in engaging and interactive experiences. But, are cool animations and eye-popping graphics are enough to produce effective team building?



Photo by [Torley](#) via Flickr

As soon as you receive your brief case and Mission Access Code, your team logs into the Spy Inc. headquarters website from any computer in the world. This activates the clock. You have 3 hours to complete your mission. Your mission briefing consists of a dossier with your scenario, objectives, advice, and clues. You're given the coordinates for the location in your city where you'll rendez-vous with the other agents in your spy network to obtain more clues to help you complete your mission. Your performance is measured by time, the other performance of the other teams, and the track record of previous agents. As soon as you complete your mission, you log off with your correct solution codes. Your time is calculated and presented on the Cyber League Table. Results are compared and debriefed. Debriefing focuses on problem-solving, planning, team management, and delegation.

Demo: [Spy Inc. Demo](#)

UK based [Clever Zebra](#), a virtual worlds events company, recently designed a 3D immersive meeting in Second Life for a global consulting firm's 3 day IT leadership conference. Team building exercises incorporated 3D puzzle building, dancing competitions, and treasure hunts.

Benefits of Virtual Team Building

Some of the benefits of virtual team building include:

- virtual simulations can easily be customized with company logos, products and services
 - the same experience can be replicated to enhance learning and provide opportunities for review and practice
 - virtual simulations can be completed in a relatively short period of time, reducing the amount of time team members are off the job
- a full team building cycle including context setting, simulation, debriefing, and business application exercises can be comfortably in half a day without analytical learners feeling pressured or rushed
- companies can bring international teams together and save travel, meal and hotel expenses

Examples of Virtual Worlds for Team Building

If you're having trouble picturing how this can work, here are some examples.

The Second Life Update blog has a video demonstrating how team members around the world can log into Second Life to participate in a variety of team exercises, games, and activities using virtual characters.

Demo: [Virtual Team Building Videos and Exercises](#)

According to Stephen Hillanbrand, owner of Amusitronix and a member of LinkedIn's Event Planning and Management Group, "Not only is it possible to place virtual people in a virtual world, real world people, products and logos can also be placed INSIDE a short, fun and interactive experience that reinforces a company's branding." Here are some examples:

Demos: [Virtual Reality, Interactive Game & Simulator](#)

Towards a Business Case for Virtual Team Building

In his [Winning Workplaces blog](#), LinkedIn member Mark Harbeke shared the experience of a Seattle-based professional services provider to underscore the potential business case for incorporating virtual teams into team building initiatives. I agree, virtual team building does seem to be worth exploring.

Is the "Virtual" in Virtual Team Building Enough?

Remember, cool animations and eye-popping graphics should never be the key drivers of your team building initiatives. When we last explored team building, we identified the phases required to produce effective team building (See [Team Building: Getting the Name Right](#).) The critical success factors for virtual team building are the same as any other team building. The exercises, simulations, activities, or games are only as effective as the context setting before the experience and the debriefing and business application exercises that follow it. Remember to always include these key elements to transform virtual simulations from eye candy and entertainment into powerful and effective team building delivered in an exciting and engaging way.

Social Media Reflections:

Join Anne Thornley-Brown for discussion about team building in LinkedIn's [**International Team Building Alliance**](#) Group.