

How To Create Impressive Simulation Concepts – Rapidly

Having an effective method to help convince your customers that you have the solution to their learning problems is paramount to the success of a demonstration or pitch. You could be pitching to a potential customer, a line manager or other stakeholder and it's your job to convince them that the simulation you want to create is the answer they've been looking for.

Sometimes though, the person you're demonstrating to has no idea about immersive simulations, 3D virtual worlds or serious games and trying to explain the benefits of such things is often lost in translation – or is never translated at all. Breaking down these barriers can be a difficult obstacle to overcome and it is only through years of experience of being on the frontline of these obstacles that Caspian Learning's instructional designers have developed a simple but effective methodology for solving this problem.

Rapid 'Prototyping' with Thinking Worlds

Caspian Learning's proprietary technology, Thinking Worlds, is a 3D authoring tool that is built on the fundamental blocks that make up learning scenarios such as multiple choice questions, performance tracking and LMS compliance. It is the only serious games engine in the world that has been specifically designed from the ground up to encompass the core requirements of immersive, 'virtual' 3D elearning.

Using Thinking Worlds, designers with no programming knowledge are able to use simple drag and drop authoring techniques to rapidly create contextual learning scenarios that can be published quickly as standalone applications or as simulations playable in a web browser. This rapid publishing capability makes the creation of 'prototypes' very fast, very easy and very professional.

Creating Concepts for Demo Purposes

By far the best way to illustrate the advantages of immersive learning simulations to people who aren't convinced of their value is to actually show and play them in a context that has meaning to the observer. The problem with this concept however is that it is not cost-effective to create individual simulations for every pitch and almost impossible, given the time constraints normally associated with them, for custom artwork, environments, characters and objects to be created.

There is an easy to implement solution, however. Simulation 'prototyping'. This is a method that we practice that is taken from our **Iterative Chaptering** design process, which is the framework behind all Caspian Learning created simulations and serious games. Iterative Chaptering (IC) is a rapid prototyping and development process that results in happier clients, more interesting sims and games, and – most importantly – improved performance from the learner. It is achieved by creating a skeleton or 'placeholder' simulation that has some of the logic and game functions of the final version included, but uses stock art assets for illustration purposes.

The concept of Rapid 'Prototyping' is only part of our IC framework but it can be applied to the creation of simulations for demo purposes too and the following steps outline how you can make use of this design technique for your own demonstrations.

- Use a stock environment with the same general characteristics that the final environment will have. For example, select one of the stock offices in Thinking Worlds if your final game will be in an office.
- For characters, use several stock characters that have the same general look-and-feel that the final characters will probably have. This is helpful, although not necessary, because any character will do as long as it is accompanied by an explanation.
- Create some short interactions that will be similar to some of the interactions in the final game to illustrate the interactivity. Thinking Worlds makes creating these interactions very easy and very quickly.
- Aim to create a total of five minutes of game play with one "Wow!" moment – A "wow" moment could be a camera movement, a particle effect, a sound or an interaction. Make your "wow" moment exciting to show the audience how easy it is to become immersed in your games.
- Finally, when you show the prototype, explain to the audience that it is a rough skeletal version of what you have in mind for the final version. Explain how the stock environment can easily be changed, the

characters will change to the appropriate ones and any sounds or atmospheric, immersive aspects will also be changed to the appropriate ones for the final simulation.

During your demo, be sure to note the comments that the audience makes as you go through the prototype – what did they like? What did they hate? Whose opinion is most important?

The final outcome will be that the rapid prototyping process will have allowed you to “wow” your audience with an interactive simulation that is appropriate to their problem – albeit using stock or ‘placeholder’ graphics and objects. By the end of it, you will have used stock assets to demonstrate the idea behind your simulation, but you will have kept the ideas contextual and relevant to the audience’s needs. This shows them the potential behind the concept.

During the process, you should encourage questions that explore the ‘what if...’ element and get the audience to visualise the final project after their own art, objects and environments have replaced the ones on screen.

Following this method will allow you to rapidly create impressive simulations as needed, and hopefully win you more work along the way.