



Immersive Internet Storytelling Series, Issue #2

End Death-By-Lecture: Tours, Not Speeches

The ThinkBalm Innovation Community Shares Lessons Learned

January 14, 2009

By [Erica Driver](#) and [Sam Driver](#), Principals, [ThinkBalm](#)

With [ThinkBalm Innovation Community](#) contributors: [Barbara Schwarz](#), [Claus Nehmzow](#), [Eilif Trondsen](#), [Jeff Lowe](#), [Leslie Pagel](#), and [Santi Garcia](#).

TRADITIONAL PRESENTATION FORMAT HAS SHORTCOMINGS

What we are about to say, we say at great risk because as industry analysts we deliver a lot of presentations. It's part of the job. Okay, deep breath . . . Here goes . . . Presentations are boring. There. We said it. Now for the quick back-pedal. Not *all* presentations are boring. Click through the [TEDTalks videos](#) or the videos from Business Innovation Factory conferences ([BIF-4 was the most recent](#)) — or watch [Randy Pausch's last lecture](#) — and you'll see lots of great speeches. Speakers can breathe life into presentations with a sense of humor, clear communication, and good props. Even traditional-style presentations with PowerPoint slides can be engaging and interesting if the right people are in the room and they are run more like discussions, with lots of interaction and Q&A throughout.

As ThinkBalm Innovation Community member Jeff Lowe puts it, presentations and lectures are about conveying meaning, and meaning is negotiated and formed through interaction. In this vein, as long as audience members are sitting silently in their seats while a speaker stands up and talks (whether we are all in a room together or the presentation takes place via Web conferencing or video conferencing), speakers' ability to engage listeners' minds and deliver value is capped. In our view:

- **The whole concept of a lecture requires an overhaul.** Speakers can do much to make the presentation experience more engaging and valuable. Some examples? Deliver messages in short bursts (say, 10 minutes), rather than one-hour

increments. Provide a way for participants to see an entire slide deck, not just one slide at a time, so they know what's coming and can help guide the speaker toward what they care about most. Give audiences something to *do* while the speaker is talking — the grown-up equivalent of school teachers giving kids coloring books and crayons during story hour. Provide a means for participants to communicate with the speaker and with one another during sessions — even while the speaker is talking. Allow participants to *experience* what the speaker is talking about. If a picture is worth a thousand words, an immersive experience is worth a thousand pictures.

- **Immersive Internet “un-lectures” are one way to enact the overhaul.** An un-lecture is a new format we've begun experimenting with in the ThinkBalm Innovation Community. An un-lecture is a 60- to 90-minute event during which four or five community members each deliver a 10-minute demo, tour, or presentation about something enterprise [Immersive Internet](#)-related that they have done or are working on. These events take place in immersive environments. Participants can move their avatars around in 3D space and interact with environments and objects. They can talk with the presenter and each other via voice, group text chat, or private text chat. In our view, participants in an un-lecture event walk away with an experience, not just a few bullet points and a set of printed-out PowerPoint slides.
- **Tours and demos turn passive audiences into active participants.** We recognize that not all content can be distilled into 10-minute sound bites, but there's no doubt that many people have short attention spans and a more dynamic and interactive presentation increases engagement. Un-lectures are a good way of keeping people moving and therefore the creative, interactive juices flowing, without having to dodge chairs in the middle of a room. Keep participants interacting with the environment so even if the majority of the presentation is dominated by a single presenter in the voice channel, people are building connections with each other and connecting around the content of the meeting. The simplest thing to do if you have no props other than slides is to put the slides up on poster boards and have people walk their avatars from one slide to the next. This way people don't lose the broader context but still have clear emphasis on the current slide, and can refer back to other slides as needed.

THINKBALM INNOVATION COMMUNITY'S UN-LECTURE #1

The purpose of the ThinkBalm Innovation Community's un-lecture event series is to spread the wealth of knowledge and experience that exists in the community, strengthen bonds among members, create opportunities for serendipitous interactions, and collectively master how to move beyond traditional, often unexciting presentations to deliver high-value interactive experiences. On December 1, 2008 the ThinkBalm Innovation Community held its first un-lecture event. We structured the event as a four-stop tour (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Agenda for ThinkBalm Innovation Community’s Un-Lecture #1, Dec. 1st 2008

Presenter	Time	Topic
<i>Location: PADI Dive World island, Second Life</i>		
Sam Driver, ThinkBalm	5 mins	Welcome and introductions
Claus Nehmzow, Alcus Int'l Ltd.	10 mins	Cigna’s use of Second Life for healthcare education
Jeff Lowe, OU Center for Public Mgmt.	10 mins	Demo of the Ideographer project (3D mindmapping tool)
John Kinsella, PADI	10 mins	Presentation on PADI’s marketing and R&D efforts in Second Life
<i>Location: Michelin private island, Second Life</i>		
Philippe Barraud, Michelin	10 mins	Tour of Michelin’s enterprise architecture training environment
Erica Driver, ThinkBalm	5 mins	Wrap-up, closing comments

Source: ThinkBalm

Fifteen community members participated in this event. Because the presenters were sharing work they’d done on Second Life-specific projects, we held the meeting in a couple of Second Life locations: [PADI’s Dive World](#) and a private [Michelin](#) island dedicated to IT training. The tour included:

- **A presentation on CIGNA’s use of Second Life for healthcare education.** Claus Nehmzow, entrepreneur and advisor with Alcus International Ltd., discussed CIGNA’s use of Second Life to create a virtual extension of its health coaching service.¹ Claus lead the team at brand experience design firm Method that helped CIGNA launch an immersive environment for conducting healthcare seminars and consultations and educating their customers through interactive exhibits and games. For his presentation, Claus set up a half dozen PowerPoint slides on poster boards on a sandy beach at Dive World (see Figure 2). As he moved from one slide to the next, participants walked our avatars along next to his or used our camera controls to zoom in on the slide he was discussing.
- **A hands-on demo of Jeff Lowe’s 3D mindmapping tool project.** Jeff Lowe, project manager at University of Oklahoma Center for Public Management, demonstrated the latest version of a 3D interactive mindmapping tool he built (see Figure 3). He originally created this tool for ThinkBalm Innovation Community brainstorming sessions and is now collaborating on a full-fledged open source version with several other people.² During his un-lecture, Jeff gave participants a quick tutorial on how to use the tool and gave a status update on the collaborative project to develop the next version.

¹ For more information on CIGNA’s use of Second Life for healthcare education, see [this case study on the Method Web site](#).

² For more information on the ThinkBalm Innovation Community’s use of Jeff Lowe’s 3D mindmapping tool for brainstorming see the October 23, 2008 article [The ThinkBalm Innovation Community brainstorms in 3D](#).

- **A presentation on PADI’s use of Second Life for marketing and R&D.** After Claus Nehmzow and Jeff Lowe finished their un-lectures on the beach, [John Kinsella](#), vice president in charge of educational curricula and products at the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), led the group to another section of Dive World — a simulated underwater dive area complete with sea creatures and sunken ships (see Figure 4). John shared insights into how he was able to keep his Second Life investment funded for 2009 during a tight budget cycle and discussed his plans for using the immersive environment during the coming months.
- **A tour of Michelin’s island for training IT pros on enterprise architecture concepts.** [Philippe Barreaud](#), chief enterprise architect at Michelin, opened up access to the private EA Factory island Michelin’s IT group uses to train technologists on complex enterprise architecture concepts. He lead a tour around the island, stopping off at the various interactive learning stations his team uses to teach complex concepts like what enterprise architecture is, what a business ambition is, how governance should work, and how to prioritize IT projects. We concluded our tour in front of a 3D data chart representing the feedback scores from the roughly 200 IT pros that have gone through the training to date (see Figure 5).

Figure 2: Claus Nehmzow delivering a presentation about CIGNA’s use of Second Life for healthcare education



Source: ThinkBalm

Figure 3: Jeff Lowe preparing for a demo of the latest version of his 3D mindmapping tool



Source: ThinkBalm

Figure 4: John Kinsella discussing PADI's use of its Dive World island for marketing and R&D



Source: ThinkBalm

Figure 5: Philippe Barreaud concluding a tour of Michelin's enterprise architecture training island



Source: ThinkBalm

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We learned some important lessons during Un-Lecture #1. Overall the session ran smoothly and feedback from participants and presenters was excellent. The biggest hiccup was that not all participants were on the necessary access control list (in the right Second Life group) to be able to participate in the last stop on our tour: Michelin's private EA Factory island. Our Michelin "tour guide" Philippe Barreaud was able to add people to his access control list up until his part of the un-lecture event began, but people who discovered at the very last minute that they weren't on the list were unable to join.

Must-Dos For Turning Lectures Into Tours

We are finding that short sessions held in stimulating immersive environments hold peoples' attention and deliver value. Our recommendations:

- **Keep it short.** Rather than have one speaker talk for an hour, consider having multiple speakers present for just a few minutes each. This keeps both speakers and participants awake and active. It also requires a lot of coordination so expect to spend more time than you're used to getting calendars synced and teaching people how to use the immersive environment. If you have a single presenter, consider clustering presentation aids like PowerPoint slides together to indicate distinct changes in direction throughout the piece. A short stroll through 3D space makes a clear break point for questions and topic changes.

- **Mix it up.** Intersperse hands-on and interactive activities — interacting with tools or displays, gathering for a group snapshot, or playing mini-games that have a purpose — with more traditional lecture-style presentations. If you do include games, make sure they are not so complex as to leave newbies behind. It can be good to mix the topics up, too, to keep peoples’ brains engaged.
- **Pick a big enough space for your event.** Choose virtual space that is big enough for avatars to move around comfortably and that encourages attendees to mix and mingle a little bit prior to the official start of the meeting. Maybe even have the official meeting start 10 minutes past the hour to give people time to chitchat, thereby broadening and deepening their connections. Choose space that has room for presenters to set up poster boards and 3D objects they want to show or demo.
- **Get creative with space.** Use spaces that help presenters tell their stories. There’s no need to hold an un-lecture in a virtual replica of a stuffy, low-ceilinged hotel meeting room or executive board room. Experiment with outdoor, out-of-season, and faraway locations, as well as places that would be impossible to visit in the physical world (think Mars, a molecule, the human heart, or the center of the earth) — the environment will help keep participants engaged. ThinkBalm Innovation Community member Barbara Schwarz said, “I . . . thoroughly enjoyed walking into the sea and feeling as though manta rays were swimming overhead. Seeing a particular presentation held in the subject matter's corresponding / rightful context brings home what a particular pitch / proposition is all about.”
- **Designate critical roles: tech, timekeeper, and scribe.** The role of the tech is to help participants troubleshoot issues they encounter with this emerging technology. The timekeeper’s job is to introduce speakers as their turn comes up, handle transitions between segments, and give speakers a time countdown. For Un-Lecture #1 we used the text chat channel and bright red font to communicate (e.g., “Jeff, you have 5 minutes left.”). The scribe takes notes and snapshots and saves a copy of the group text chat for archiving. Think twice about assigning multiple roles to the same person. We’ve made this mistake several times during ThinkBalm Innovation Community events and the result is meeting artifacts that are lower quality than they could be or newbie participants who are left to fend for themselves.
- **Communicate instructions ahead of time.** Do it multiple times, in multiple ways. Send instructions on how to get into the immersive environment via email, post it on a team workspace, and send messages via the functionality of the enterprise immersive platform (“in-world”). Send a reminder message the night before the event — and perhaps again 15-20 minutes prior to the event’s start — containing all necessary instructions (e.g., groups the person needs to join to get access to spaces, dial-in number and passcode, etc.)
- **Make it easy for participants to find the gathering spot.** Make sure that once avatars arrive in the designated location, people know how to find their way to the exact spot where the first presentation is being held. Each immersive environment handles this a little differently. Signage can help if someone needs to move their avatars a few meters from the landing spot to the presentation area. If using Second Life, as we did for Un-Lecture #1, people need to know how to use the mini map and move their avatar toward the green dots, which represent other avatars.

Pitfalls To Avoid When Turning Presentations Into Tours

The Immersive Internet allows us to do things that we can't do in the physical world. We can take the best with us and leave the rest behind. For example:

- **Ditch those slide projectors.** In a hotel meeting room, for example, it's not practical to put huge images of each slide up on the walls around you and have people walk up to the slides as you discuss them. There isn't enough space, there aren't enough projectors, and people would get tired standing the whole time. But there's no need to replicate these limitations in an immersive environment, where space is unlimited and avatars never get tired. If you use slides, try setting them all up and arranging them in the 3D space so participants can walk around and view them. Utilize the 3D space to create break points for questions and topic changes.
- **Leave the rows of chairs behind, too, unless they add value.** The main reason to use chairs in immersive presentation spaces is to program into them the view the avatar is supposed to see. In general, people like having something to do while they are listening — even if it's just walking their avatar around or changing their point of view using avatar motion or camera controls. It does require training for people to feel comfortable moving avatars from one location to another — via walking, running, flying, or teleporting — and using camera controls. But once people know how to do it, moving around keeps them on their toes and allows the presenter to keep tabs on who's staying with the group and who's not.
- **Don't go crazy with myriad locations.** Whenever you require participants to teleport from one location to another you risk losing people — especially newbies who aren't familiar with how to navigate the immersive environment. The risk of something going wrong increases when one or more of the locations require participants to get special access or clearance ahead of time. When using multiple locations, it's extra critical to plan ahead and make sure that if people want to set up objects or content for their presentation permissions have been set up correctly.
- **Don't host your meeting on Mars unless you are sure people are ready for it.** The temptation is to go wild, creating or borrowing a fantastic space because it might spark an imagination or build interest. Resist! Outlandish backdrops without a legitimate reason can be a turn-off in business meetings — at least until more business people become comfortable using the Immersive Internet. Having a budget meeting in “The Land of Exotic Fantasies” just might get you fired. However, unlimited creative license is unbeatable when you can hold a design meeting inside a 3D model of a product design under discussion, for example. Optimally, strike a balance between exact replication of physical-world buildings and presentation spaces and wildly fantastic environments.

RELATED THINKBALM RESEARCH

Reports

- [*Role-Play Redux: "Convince The Curmudgeon,"*](#) Dec. 17, 2008
- [*The Immersive Internet: Make Tactical Moves Today For Strategic Advantage Tomorrow,*](#) November 17, 2008

Articles

- [*Here's a way to communicate "I'm busy" in immersive environments,*](#) Jan. 6, 2009
- [*Lightbulb moment: for serendipity, stay logged into the immersive environment,*](#) Jan. 6, 2009
- [*Using the Immersive Internet for employee onboarding,*](#) Dec. 6, 2008
- [*Anonymity in the workplace: it is appropriate, sometimes,*](#) Nov. 26, 2008
- [*Recipe for a great 3D brainstorming session,*](#) November 10, 2008
- [*Economic slowdown will spur enterprise Immersive Internet adoption,*](#) October 29, 2008
- [*The ThinkBalm Innovation Community brainstorms in 3D!*](#) October 23, 2008
- [*Immersive Internet insights from IBM's InnovationJam 2008,*](#) October 21, 2008
- [*Second Life survey says: "Try it for work — you'll like it,"*](#) October 10, 2008
- [*New technologies add immersiveness to the flat 2D Web,*](#) September 29, 2008
- [*Digital prototypes help university team get \\$550k+ in technology funding,*](#) September 24, 2008
- [*The ThinkBalm Innovation Community: What have we done lately?*](#) September 11, 2008
- [*A glimpse inside the ThinkBalm Innovation Community, 10 days in,*](#) August 29, 2008
- [*Accenture recruiting in Second Life cost-effectively targets the "Facebook audience,"*](#) August 14, 2008
- [*Daden Ltd. and VoxVue deliver immersive experiences about real places,*](#) August 1, 2008
- [*The Immersive Internet and Kevin Kelly's "5,000 days of the Web,"*](#) July 31, 2008
- [*A realism model for Immersive Internet apps: Part II,*](#) July 21, 2008
- [*A realism model for Immersive Internet apps: Part I,*](#) July 21, 2008
- [*At Microsoft, cost of virtual events about 1/3 the cost of traditional events,*](#) July 18, 2008
- [*My take on Microsoft's Immersive Internet play for information workers,*](#) July 17, 2008
- [*Dassault Systemes: An Immersive Internet contender to watch,*](#) July 2, 2008
- [*Heavy equipment manufacturer explores Immersive Internet for product prototyping,*](#) July 1, 2008

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Erica Driver



Erica Driver is a co-founder and principal at ThinkBalm. She is a leading industry analyst with nearly 15 years of experience in the IT sector. She is quoted in mainstream and industry trade press including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, *CIO*, and *Computerworld*. Prior to co-founding ThinkBalm, Erica was a Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, where she launched the company's Web3D coverage as part of her enterprise collaboration research. She was also the co-conspirator behind Forrester's Information Workplace concepts and research.

While at Forrester, Erica served as a strategic advisor to a wide range of clients, including Alcoa, Bell Canada, Dominion Resources, GlaxoSmithKline, IBM, Marriott, Microsoft, Raytheon, Roche, the United Nations, and the U.S. General Services Administration. Prior to her tenure at Forrester, she was a Director at Giga Information Group (now part of Forrester) and an analyst at Hurwitz Group (now Hurwitz & Associates). She began her career in IT as a system administrator and Lotus Notes developer. Erica is a graduate of Harvard University.

Sam Driver



Sam Driver is a co-founder and principal at ThinkBalm. He is an inventor and entrepreneur whose take on the Immersive Internet is heavily influenced by science, game theory, and science fiction. At the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Sam was part of a team that discovered RNA interference (RNAi), which was awarded the 2006 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine. He founded QIK Technology to develop intellectual property (IP) holdings in functional genomics and co-founded a small Rhode Island-based residential real estate investment partnership. Sam also founded and operates Evil Minions Games, an IP and product development company, established and runs a regional gaming organization, and is an instrument-rated private pilot. Sam

earned his BS at Ohio Wesleyan University and a Masters in genetics from the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

ThinkBalm Innovation Community Contributors

A very special thanks to the following ThinkBalm Innovation Community members who participated in Un-Lecture #1 on December 1, 2008 and reviewed and contributed to this report prior to its publication:

[Barbara Schwarz](#), [Claus Nehmzow](#), [Eilif Trondsen](#), [Jeff Lowe](#), [Leslie Pagel](#), and [Santi Garcia](#).

About ThinkBalm

ThinkBalm offers independent IT industry analysis and strategic advisory services to technology marketers and Immersive Internet advocates, implementers, and explorers. We focus on enterprise use of the Immersive Internet, which includes:

- Virtual worlds and campuses
- Immersive learning simulations
- Serious games
- 3D business applications

ThinkBalm also operates and nurtures the ThinkBalm Innovation Community, a collaborative community with the mission of propelling enterprise use of the Immersive Internet forward. The ThinkBalm Innovation Community has the Spigit™ serious game engine at its core.

Contact Us

ThinkBalm
4 South of Commons, Box 321
Little Compton, RI 02837 USA
Ph: +1 (401) 592-0170
www.thinkbalm.com
info@thinkbalm.com

