

World Without Oil



Location

U.S. centric but with worldwide 'playership'

Aim

World Without Oil's aim is to use an alternate reality game to engage the public with a possible future, in which a global oil demand rises five percent above supply, with the end goal of making this future less likely to happen.

Description

"A serious game for the public good, addressing the issue of oil dependency and energy security."

<http://worldwithouthoil.org/metafaq3.htm>

World Without Oil was an Alternate Reality Game (ARG), commissioned by a non-profit public media company, ITVS of San Francisco, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The game ran for a month between May and June 2007. It simulated the first 32 weeks of a global oil shortage, and it was up to players to chronicle events, whether as blog posts, videos, images, or voicemails. The game did not dictate points of view or outcomes to the players, instead the team established realistic parameters of the oil shock (for example the price and availability of fuel on any given week) but it was up to players to imagine how these might change everyday life. In this way it engaged players at a local and personal level, while accumulating the "wisdom of crowds" in order that their collective imagination might reveal the economic, social, and environmental consequences that could elude even the experts.

The game was designed to be accessible to anyone, not just gamers; it simply required players to suspend disbelief and to imagine the oil crisis was really happening to them. Technical requirements were low; if you didn't blog, you could email or leave a voicemail by phone. Because it validated personal experience, it gave players the confidence to contribute ideas and collaborate freely.

The archives can be viewed at <http://worldwithouthoil.org> and lesson plans are available for high school teachers who wish to take advantage of the materials gathered to engage students with questions about the role energy plays in lives.



Graphic illustrating how World Without Oil brings together a number of recent developments in gaming and social media.

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Scale

- More than 1900 people signed up as players
- More than 1500 stories were submitted
- There were 60,000 active observers
- The site is still visited by more than 6000 people every month
- 32 days of full game play running from April 30-June 1, 2007

Staffing

- Director, Ken Eklund—Full-time
- Webmaster, Mark Bracewell—Full-time
- Four Gamemasters—Contract (half-time)
- Participation Architect—Contract
- Web Designer—Contract
- Outreach Manager—Contract
- Three voice actors, videographer, two facilitators—Contract
- Publicity by the client

Cost

Approximately \$90,000 USD.

Price

Free for participants.

Leading Practice

- The world's first "serious ARG" using the alternate reality game structure to immersive experience a possible future and thus to collaboratively educate, activate, and explore solutions to a real-world issue on a global scale
- Innovative use of a "what if?" narrative to evoke and focus the "wisdom of crowds" on a real-world issue and evoke massively participatory "citizen journalism."
- A game that encouraged and rewarded cooperative "in-game" play
- Groundbreaking "open-sourcing" of the game narrative to players, with a subsequent heightening of player immersion and engagement with affective learning

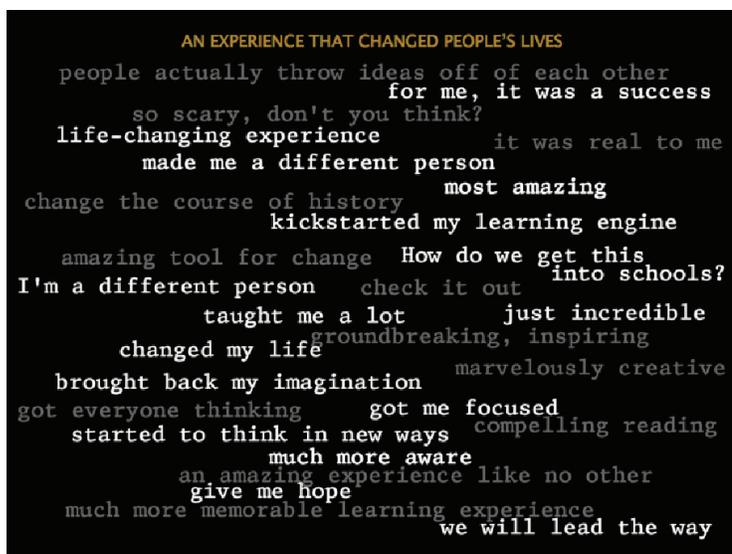
Lessons Learned

Games such as World Without Oil can:

- Cause very active, democratic, and participatory communities to coalesce rapidly around issues of common interest
- Incorporate powerful group learning mechanisms into the gameplay, such as collaborative learning, enquiry-based learning, experiential learning, peer learning, and ownership of the game and its results
- Be effective at encouraging people to evaluate issues, and motivate them to take action
- Be non-partisan, satisfying, and fun

Impact

- The game process is the focus of much study worldwide because of its ability to engender a widely democratic public discussion on issues and policy, and its ability to spark a massively participatory experiential learning space to grow organically, with several people authoring papers and dissertations relating to the experience. In addition, the game's leading-edge structure and premise caused a viral spread into press and blogs worldwide.
- After the game was over, many players wrote to World Without Oil to express how much the game had affected them: not only in outlook, but also behavior: "As for me, in this here and now, I'm a different person thanks to World Without Oil. I'm much more aware of the fragile thread that supports the lifestyle that myself and others keep. I'm making changes, but there's a long way to go. But I am changing, and that means that for me, WWO was a success," MTALON (player).
- The game attained cross-category awards and recognition: for activism, for art, for technology, for environmentalism, and as an entertaining Internet game.
- The legacy of World Without Oil has been a set of resources that can be used for learning and teaching long after the game has finished.
- The game archive and meta pages continue to draw thousands of visitors a month.
- Several games have been designed based on the success of World Without Oil; most notably Superstruct and Ruby's Bequest, with more in the planning stages.



Collation of feedback from players at the end of the game,
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Technology

- **Network**
Broadband (but a more limited version of the game could be played over mobile phone)
- **Hardware**
Cameras, video cameras, PCs/Macs, mobile phones
- **Software**
Blogs, website, discussion forum, various other online
- **Media**
Video, graphics, text, podcasts, and voicemail (mobile, email, discussion forum)

Similar Projects

Superstruct, Serious ARG, www.superstructgame.org/

Read the Education Best Practices Whitepaper and other case studies at:

www.cisco.com/web/strategy/docs/education/CiscoEdBestPracticesWhitePaper-D2_V1.pdf

Sources

Eckland, K, 2009, Email interview with Ken Eckland, (World Without Oil game designer)

World Without Oil website: <http://worldwithoutoil.org>



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