

An Interview With Mark Kingdon, CEO Of Linden Labs - Second Life

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, “Wait a minute”, hello, my name is Lon Sands, co-author of *The Social Media Bible* published by John Wiley & Sons, the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of Social Media. Today we are here, in *Second Life*...how do you like that...in the *Social Media Bible* Garden with Mark Kingdon, “Wait a minute”, that’s M. Lindon, the CEO of *Linden Labs* and creator of *Second Life Virtual Environment*.

We’ll be speaking today about Social Media, virtual environments, and of course we’ll be talking a lot about *Second Life*. So Mark, or “M,” excuse me, “M” it’s truly great to have you here today. Thank you.



MK: It’s my pleasure. Thank you for inviting me. It’s wonderful to be able to do this in *Second Life*; terrific!

LS: This is really exciting. I mean, I’ve had a lot of “firsts” in technology and I’ve got to tell you this is the “First of the First” that I have ever actually done an interview in a virtual environment. To be able to participate in *Second Life* and to be able to sit on the same bench and speak with you, that’s quite a big deal. So thank you for coming out today.

MK: Well, it’s wonderful to be able to do it and to talk about Social Media, and to do it in the context of one of the most important Social Media platforms of our time, right; the virtual world.

LS: Yeah, I totally agree! We had some conversations as the people were coming in about why we chose *Second Life* to go into *The Social Media Bible*, and in my opinion...honest to goodness...*Second Life*, to me, is the epitome of what Social Media is. I mean, trusted networks so anytime you can get one million people in the same place. That’s a trusted network.



And just look around at the user generated content. I think it’s just “spike” all of the categories.

MK: It does. There’s something like 2 billion items in the databases; you know, content and scripts that *Second Life* residents have created. It’s really a powerful platform for co-creation, for collaboration, and just generally for creating amazing things.

LS: And I’ve got to agree, too. When, at the last minute you suggested that we do this interview here in *Second Life*, Genie and Drew Gustafson and Steven Groves; we all got together and put this garden together. But honestly, it was such a collaborative effort from everybody participating; we couldn’t have done it, any one of us, on our own. And I think, again, that really exemplifies what Social Media stands for.

MK: You did a great job, I have to say. It’s a really terrific space and this is so much better than just doing a basic tele-conference or even a video-conference. It is wonderful to see the creativity that went in this and the good-looking avatars in the audience.

LS: They're pretty interesting, if you notice the invitation says, "The dress for today will be business casual or any kind of weird avatar you have."

MK: We do a lot of our meetings at *Linden Labs* inside of *Second Life*. I would say that I spend anywhere from one to four hours a day in *Second Life* and, as you can imagine because folks at *Linden Labs* are so involved in the *Second Life* experience, that we have an amazing array of creative avatars. You can have jellyfish, tugboats, beagles, piles of rocks; it's just an endless array of crazy avatars. It's a blast!

LS: That is amazing! You and I, we've been talking about Social Media and *Second Life* as if everybody understood what *Second Life* was. For the couple of people who have actually grown up in a cave and haven't experienced this, can you please just tell our listeners what *Second Life* is.

MK: Sure. *Second Life* is a platform and a set of content-creation and collaboration tools that users use to populate this incredible three-dimensional environment, this virtual reality, with immersive experiences. So *Second Life* is a destination but it's a destination that's really created by the residents using the platform tools that we provide. And we have had, over the last sixty days I think, 1.2 million log-ins have occurred as people come to *Second Life*. So it's a really rich and vibrant community with members from literally every country in the world.

LS: And that's one of the things that I find very exciting about *Second Life*, and that is the fact that you can walk around all the different environments. These vary as everything from Egypt to the Yucatan Peninsula to Paris, and you are actually bumping into people/avatars; but they are not cartoon characters, they are representations of real people from around the globe that, otherwise, you would never have the opportunity to meet and interface with.

MK: That's right. I spend some of my time on the "help" islands when new residents are joining and we have people coming in from all over the world. And the way they express themselves, just beyond their language and the choices they make with their avatars as they create their in-world personas, is staggering. It's an amazing thing to see.

LS: Yeah, I get a big kick out of that. How do individual users... how are they actually using *Second Life*? What do you think the individual is doing with *Second Life*?

MK: Well, the amazing thing about *Second Life* is, kind of, the breadth of the use-cases, right? So *Second Life*, just like the real world, is incredibly diverse. Also the audience, the user-base is incredibly diverse. So the use-cases are as broad in *Second Life* as the experiences would be in the real world. So people use *Second Life* to go to a live-music venue and hear a concert in an intimate setting. They use it to go shopping with friends. They use it to create a personal space, like their own home, that they can enjoy in the virtual world. They use it to connect with other people around a common interest, a common concern, a common problem they share. Companies use it to work together to create products in a rapid-cycle product-development process. Companies use it for virtual meeting, for virtual leaning.

This summer [07:14.2] had their first shareholders meeting in *Second Life*. Educators use it to connect with students around the world to do research together. Governments use it to connect with their constituents. The list just goes on and on and on because *Second Life* is so broad and all encompassing.

LS: And that's absolutely amazing, and The Social Media Bible really is going to be geared more towards business and how to use these Social Media tools; and my research on Second Life and my participation over the last year has shown that there really are a lot of different Fortune 500/Fortune 2000 companies that are using Second Life, really, as a practical business tool.

Can you name any specific applications or companies that you can think of?

MK: Sure, I mean the list is really, really long. It's companies like the IBM's, Sun, Intel, Dell, Orange, British Telecom, Mattel, who I just mentioned, SIGNA; lots and lots of companies around the world are using Second Life in their business. I saw Mattel having a shareholders' meeting. Whether it's SIGNA creating a help island where their customers can connect with health information in a unique way, whether it's Cisco doing a developers conference Q & A in *Second Life*. The use-cases are really, really broad.

LS: And I have to tell you that for over a year we've actually been doing business in *Second Life*. If you go to the third floor of the building just to your right, we do something called "Three-Dimensional Advertising"; they are paper models. And if you look on the table on either side, you'll see that last year we went to work with The American Cancer Society and helped them dedicate their island; and the photo that's sitting on the table closest to [09:27.5], is the Memory Tree; American Cancer Society's Memory Tree. The cool thing was that the avatars, which are virtual representations, of course, or real people can tour this virtual island, meet other people; survivors, care-givers, health-providers. As they enter The American Cancer Society they were actually able to click on the virtual representation of this tree and then a PDF would download to their actually computer and with a little glue and scissors they can actually recreate, in first life, this paper model of the representation of the tree in *Second Life*.

So we've bridged this first life/*Second Life* cross over with the three-dimensional advertising. I've got to tell you, that's one of the most exciting concepts I've ever seen; to be able to go from virtual to real life.

MK: I love that! I'm going to download the PDF and get out my scissors! I think one of the things that we are seeing with *Second Life*, and with virtual worlds in general, is that there's increasing crossover with the real world, with the physical world. Whether it's bringing mixed-reality events, where you're bring video or information in from the real world and then connecting with it in the virtual world. And then there's the example you used, which I think is wonderful, where something is created in the virtual world and then it's extended to the real world.

One of the things that companies are doing is testing products, creating toys and the like, that you can interact with in *Second Life*, and then using what they learn there as a basis for real-world toy creations. So I think as we look forward in the virtual-world space, we'll see a lot more of that crossover between virtual world and real world, as you described.

LS: Yeah, I think that's really exciting, also, that they can actually test prototypes, conceptual design, toys, in a virtual world. It's like some of the \$100 million systems, \$500 billion systems that Boeing is using to design airplanes. This is where you can design it and see the point of view from the passenger's seat; whether they can see the exit signs adequately, but within this environment. And, really, it's free!

MK: It's an amazing way to experience a product before it's built. I think that we've only just started to scratch the surface on the "possible," right. I mean, because up until now I think that we were very much in

exploratory-phase in the virtual world space. But what we're seeing now is companies' come back a second and third time, trying new ideas, and new approaches to doing business.

LS: Absolutely, and one of the things that's been controversial is whether or not this has actually been figured out how to monetize within *Second Life*; how to use it. Now there's no doubt that corporations are saving money by bringing everybody together into a virtual environment such as *Second Life*, or for meetings or presentations. I love that concept. And just in defense of monetizing, the American Cancer Society for example, when we had the Relay for Life...if you look to your left that's a kiosk that we did a paper model design of. We had an international art contest and brought in Second Life Designers from all over the world, and we chose the 12 finalists and eventually picked a winner. That was actually released at The Relay for Life. But the point that I'm getting at is that The American Cancer Society raised nearly \$200,000 within Second Life.

MK: I was really impressed by that campaign. I thought it was a hugely powerful use of the medium and I know here at the lab we were all really inspired by what was achieved. It was huge; really epic!

LS: And Steven Estaban Graves, Steven Groves across from us, is heading up that event again this year and I'm excited about participating once again in Second Life to make The American Cancer Society a big success.

Here's another question also, that comes up. Linden Labs; how do you guys actually monetize this? How do you make money at this? I mean, it's an incredible platform.

MK: Yeah, well it's a very simple business and that is we sell land on the platform, so that people can create this amazing world. And it's through this sale of land and the maintenance fees that we get that we are able to provide this platform.

LS: So it's basically a virtual landlord.

MK: Yeah, we're virtual landlords! We sell land, collect a maintenance fee and then there are some other fees that we charge, but that's the bulk of our income. Much of that we reinvest in making the platform ever better.

LS: That's absolute. Almost every other time I log on there's another download, a new version. It just keeps getting better. Kudos to the developers. There's no doubt. If an individual wanted to log on to *Second Life* and actually become a part of this incredible experience, is it expensive for an individual? What's the process there?

MK: No, it's free for individuals, so you can log in, you can sign up, download the viewer and create your account and fully enjoy *Second Life* without spending a nickel or a Linden, because we have our own payment currency. So it's free! The accounts are free, and then if you want to buy land, obviously there's a charge for that and if you want to buy clothes for your avatar, then you need some Linden dollars to buy those from the In-world merchants.

LS: And which, by the way, the costs inside of *Second Life* using Lindens is very, very reasonable. I think I got this absolutely sporting suit for, I think I paid \$4.

MK: Yeah, and that would be considered extraordinarily high-end, an extraordinarily high-end suit, so the great thing is...and it's a great suit, by the way...(Laughter) The great thing about *Second Life* is you can get a haircut for a couple of bucks, a suit for a couple of bucks and shoes for less than that. So for less than this cost of a movie you can trick out your avatar.

LS: (Laughter) I like that...trick out your avatar for less than the cost of a movie! That's cool.

Is there anything else that you would like to tell us? Is there any kind of secret that you can share with us about something that is coming down the road or summarize what you are about?

MK: One of the things that I can tell you is that we're really working hard to listen to our user-base and to understand what our core customers are looking for in the platform. One of the really important customer-segments that we want to develop further is the enterprise customer segment, so we've been listening to enterprise customers very closely to understand what their specific needs are so as we make adjustments and changes and improvements the core *Second Life* platform it's more supportive of enterprises and educational institutions, for example.

So I think you should keep your eyes peeled because of the next year there are going to be a lot of things that we do with and to the platform to enable business in a substantial way as we continue to support our core audience around the world.

LS: Well, honestly Mark, I want to personally thank you for creating an incredible environment. I just love doing business in here and over the next several years our plan with my companies are to expand as much as we possibly can in here. I think it's the next environment; it's the next way we are going to interface with the internet. I think everybody needs to be in here and I think, eventually, everyone will be eventually.

MK: Well, thank you for that. The folks at *Linden Labs* have done a really, really heroic job paving the way for the virtual world and in creating this incredible thing called, "*Second Life*." I've just recently joined the company and I am a steward of all the great things that have been done so far. It's exciting and there's a wonderful and vibrant future ahead. I look forward to seeing you here as you grow your presence in *Second Life*.

LS: That's great! Can you tell our listeners how they can find out more about you, log on, and sign up?

MK: Sure. Just go to www.secondlife.com and you can register there and join us in world.

LS: That's awesome. I would really like to thank Mark Kingdon, excuse me, M. Linden, the CEO of *Linden Labs*, creator of *Second Life Virtual World* for being with us here today, and for speaking about *Second Life* and Social Media and Virtual Worlds and wow! Mark, truly thank you for coming out here.

MK: My pleasure, Lon. Thank you so much.

This has been Lon Safko; excuse me, Lon Sands, the co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, coming to you from *The Social Media Bible Garden* here in *Second Life*. Be sure to check out our other valuable Social Media tactics, tools, and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book and its companion website, www.thesocialmediabible.com.

And if you would like to visit *The Social Media Bible Garden*, please come on over. We are at Pinastrì, 15920320. For more information about me, Lon Safko, please visit my website at www.lonsafko.com.

And again Mark, thank you from the bottom of all of our hearts for coming out today.

MK: A great pleasure, Lon. Thank you very much for having me.