



## CIGNA-vielife in Second Life: Engaging and Interactive Health & Lifestyle Training for the Global Workforce



**“Virtual worlds is the future of health care.”**

*– Dr. Peter Mills, Chief Health Officer, vielife*

### Executive Summary:

In December 2006, global health services company CIGNA acquired **vielife**, a leading U.K. based provider of integrated health management and lifestyle coaching programs. **vielife** provides targeted and measurable health & well-being solutions including health risk assessments and lifestyle management programs to clients such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Unilever, KPMG, and GlaxoSmithKline. **vielife’s** services help client employees establish and maintain healthier lifestyles by better managing their nutrition, physical activity, sleep and stress. In 2008, CIGNA and **vielife** launched the pilot phase of a nutrition program in Second Life on an island branded GET: Go, Experience, Thrive. The program was so successful that they are exploring a wider range of virtual world training programs in Second Life addressing health issues such as sleep, stress, and fitness.

**Over 50% of pilot participants reported making changes in their lifestyle based on what they learned in Second Life.**



### After Exploring Many Emerging Technologies, **vielife** in Second Life was Launched

**vielife's** mission is to actively engage healthy and high-risk individuals *before* they get sick, and provide them with the tools to make simple lifestyle changes to get big results. The Second



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Life project was initiated in an effort to communicate in an innovative way to a diverse and geographically widespread audience. Dr. Peter Mills, **vielife’s** Chief Medical Officer said, “The corporation of today has employees all over the world. So, the challenge becomes, how do you execute very personal health communication to such a distributed audience?”

After discovering virtual worlds and Second Life in late 2007, **vielife** soon launched GET island and ran their first Second Life pilot program focused on nutritional education with nearly 800 CIGNA employees. **vielife’s** goals were simple: to discover how participants would respond to a virtual learning environment and assess what kind of behavior modification could be achieved. Second Life was chosen as the virtual world platform

because, as Mills said, it was “the most well-known and stable virtual world—with the greatest longevity.”

### A Few Pleasant Surprises Await When Training in Virtual Worlds

From the very beginning, the **vielife** team was inspired by the positive impact an immersive environment proved to have. Jason Race, **vielife’s** Project Manager on the Second Life program, explained that participants were more active in virtual world conversations than in typical real world face-to-face conversations—which made the experience more powerful and impactful for all participants. “Normally you would rarely tell your colleagues about your health concerns, but here with some level of anonymity, people open up”. According to Race, “Second Life breaks down geographic boundaries and overcomes social taboos about sensitive topics.”

Initially, Race was concerned that Second Life would only appeal to a younger demographic, but that wasn’t the case. “There’s a perception that the core audience in Second Life is 18-25,” said Race. “But that’s not accurate.” As it turned out, participants of all ages reacted very positively. CIGNA employees quickly overcame their technology trepidation and enthusiastically took part. “We completely underestimated the level of interest. They thought it was a lot of fun.”



**Taking Advantage of the Virtual World to Make a Message Stick**

vielife’s GET island includes a wide array of learning spaces, such as areas for group seminars, educational games, casual socializing, as well as a lounge-style room for group or individual counseling sessions.

Although many of these spaces may look like traditional physical world



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environments, it is possible to take advantage of the rich opportunities within the virtual world environment to help deliver more impactful messages. For example, in GET island, participants congregate in a classroom setting that mimics real life but are wowed by three-dimensional visuals. Cheeseburgers, milkshakes, and fries loom larger than life above the presenter’s dais illustrating the calorie and fat content of the typical fast food meal. Healthy foods are later represented by a literal shower of fruit that rains down from the sky demonstrating that eating right doesn’t have to mean eating only a little bit.



When playing one of the interactive games, Whack-A-Food, participants test and hone their nutritional knowledge. A variation on the classic Whack-A-Mole arcade game, Whack-A-Food presents the participant with plates of food rising up through a carnivalesque counter illuminated with game



show lights. Participants must quickly select the healthiest food item to win the most points before the plates retract and disappear.



At The Right Stuff Diner, **vielife's** interactive virtual café, nutritional information is brought into the familiar everyday context. Complete with a 1950's style soda fountain, jukebox, neon window sign, and chrome-edged counters, the diner is intended to be a fun way to teach participants how

### Health Services has a Real Future in the Virtual World

"This is the future of health care," said Dr. Mills. Large enterprises have always had globally distributed workforces, yet—perhaps now more than ever—they need to communicate



**"In Second Life a corporation can deliver programs and interventions that transcend geographical barriers. With this technology you can standardize training across your global workforce"**

– Dr. Peter Mills, Chief Health Officer, **vielife**

to make healthy choices when eating out. Giant menus at each table allow participants to be seated with their peers, as if sitting for a real meal, and discuss the menu options together.

"We want to achieve behavior change," said Dr. Mills, "and 3D graphics help to make an impact. It's not just a gimmick, but an effort to help people understand how to interpret a food label and understand daily requirements." Delivering practical information in a comfortable and engaging environment paid off with fantastic results. **vielife** found that, "over 50% of pilot participants said they had made some real change in their lifestyle based on what they learned inworld".

with employees effectively to manage health risks. "With health care costs increasing, advice about areas of modification is critical... There's no reason why a virtual environment can't eventually be used for disease management for diabetes or asthma." Dr. Mills understands the initial skepticism of his peers when faced with virtual worlds, but acceptance and interest is on the up. The pilot has fascinated senior executives across the board and CIGNA is now investigating ways to roll out the development to include a broader range of health services in Second Life.



### About vielife

Since 1988, vielife has been in operation to help improve individual and organisational performance and health. **vielife's** mission statement is to be a global leader in the critical task of transforming the way individuals, employers, health plans and governments manage physical and emotional well-being. In 2005, **vielife** was awarded with the Institute for Health & Productivity Management (IHPM) President's Award. For more information, please visit [www.vielife.com](http://www.vielife.com).

### About the Second Life, by Linden Lab

Developed and launched by Linden Lab in 2003, Second Life is the world's leading 3D virtual world environment. It enables its users -- known as Residents -- to create content, interact with others, launch businesses, collaborate and educate. With a thriving inworld economy that saw over US\$360 million in user-to-user transactions in 2008, and a broad user base that includes everyone from consumers and educators to medical researchers and large enterprises, Second Life has become one of the largest hubs of user-generated content (UGC) in the world.

Linden Lab, founded in 1999 by current Chairman of the Board Philip Rosedale and headquartered in San Francisco, develops revolutionary, immersive technologies that change the way people communicate, interact, learn and create. Privately held and profitable, Linden Lab is led by CEO Mark Kingdon and has more than 300 employees across the U.S., Europe and Asia.

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### Linden Lab

945 Battery Street

San Francisco, CA 94111

USA

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