

## ***Daily Journal of Commerce***



### **For Realtors, Second Life is first virtual opportunity** **The Oregon Association of Realtors sets up cybershop on the popular online community, hoping to reel in younger, tech-savvy agents**

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**SECOND LIFE** – The most recent meeting of the Oregon Association of Realtors was like no other: It was held on a massive luxury liner. The attendees had improbable names, like Corky Compton and Fleche Xeno. And nobody was physically there.

It was the organization's first meeting in Second Life, the sprawling online "metaverse" in which real-life people create online personalities called avatars to interact in an expansive world that features its own money, media and real estate investments.

"Depending on the success of this, we are planning to build a permanent headquarters (in Second Life)," said Sherron Lumley, the association's communications director. By adding a Second Life branch, the organization would be following the lead of Coldwell Banker, which already has a Second Life office.

But the conference room aboard the S.S. Galaxy wasn't exactly buzzing with the herky-jerky, sometimes-spastic movements of a sea of roughly-rendered people. It was a low-key affair, attended by only a handful, and intended more as an experimental introduction to an unknown realm than as a serious, business-as-usual meeting.

For one excited attendee, going by the nom de online Home Seller Republic, the opportunities of Second Life seemed boundless.

"It is awesome!" she said, her pixie-like avatar sparkling like fine silver. "I wish I could live here all the time!"

The association's CEO, Andrea Bushnell, led the proceedings in the guise of her avatar, OAR Republic. The purpose of the online push, she said, is to create a virtual community where Realtors can network, hold meetings or potentially find real estate leads.

The association, and the agents in attendance, hope Second Life will open up a wealth of possibilities.

"To many gamers, this is just play," Home Seller Republic, a 10-year real-estate veteran, said.

"But for some, it's serious business."

Large corporations and independent capitalists alike have boarded the Second Life bandwagon, with a few having fallen off along the way. Intel, Cisco and Coca-Cola have, to differing degrees of success, set up shop in Second Life. And news service Reuters even has a virtual bureau where real journalists report on Second Life's very real economy, among other newsworthy topics.

But many businesses, such as Cisco, have stopped doing business via Second Life, saying it wasn't profitable.

"But it's perfect for a trade organization, because we're not in Second Life specifically to make money," Lumley said.

Getting the younger generation of real estate agents involved is a goal. The average age for Realtors nationally is about 52, Lumley says. But younger professionals are entering the industry as the older generation retires. These real estate agents are generally more tech-savvy and open to previously untapped networking opportunities, she says.

Katie Cox, a 24-year-old real estate agent based in Oregon, says she appreciates the new, youthful approach.

"It's just a fun way for people to get together in a not-so-stuffy environment and communicate," Cox said.

She says she's no tech-nerd, but she sees the possibilities of Second Life and other online networking tools. And as a new agent, with only one year of experience, the more people she meets, the more confidence she gains.

For Bushnell, the association's CEO – aka OAR Republic – there is no lack of confidence concerning where online networking can lead real estate professionals.

"When this goes mainstream," OAR Republic said to the meeting's attendees, "the Oregon Association of Realtors will be considered ahead of its time when others are still trying to figure out what an avatar is."