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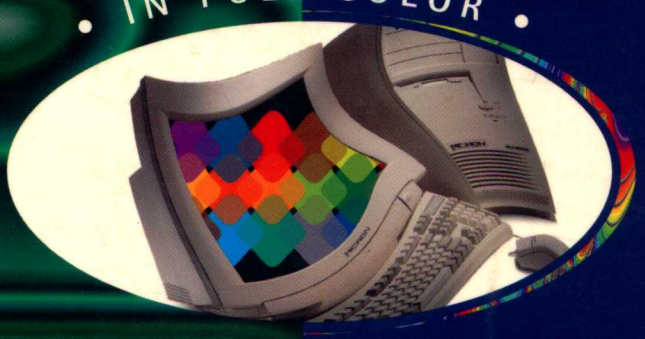

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# How to Program a Virtual Community

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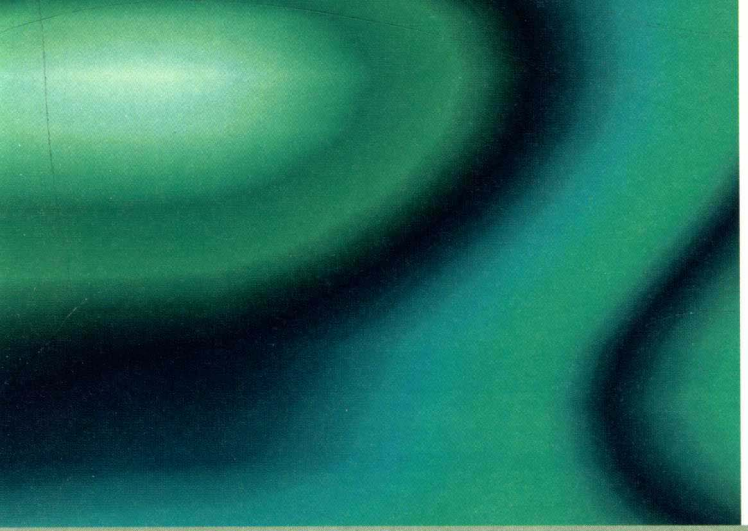
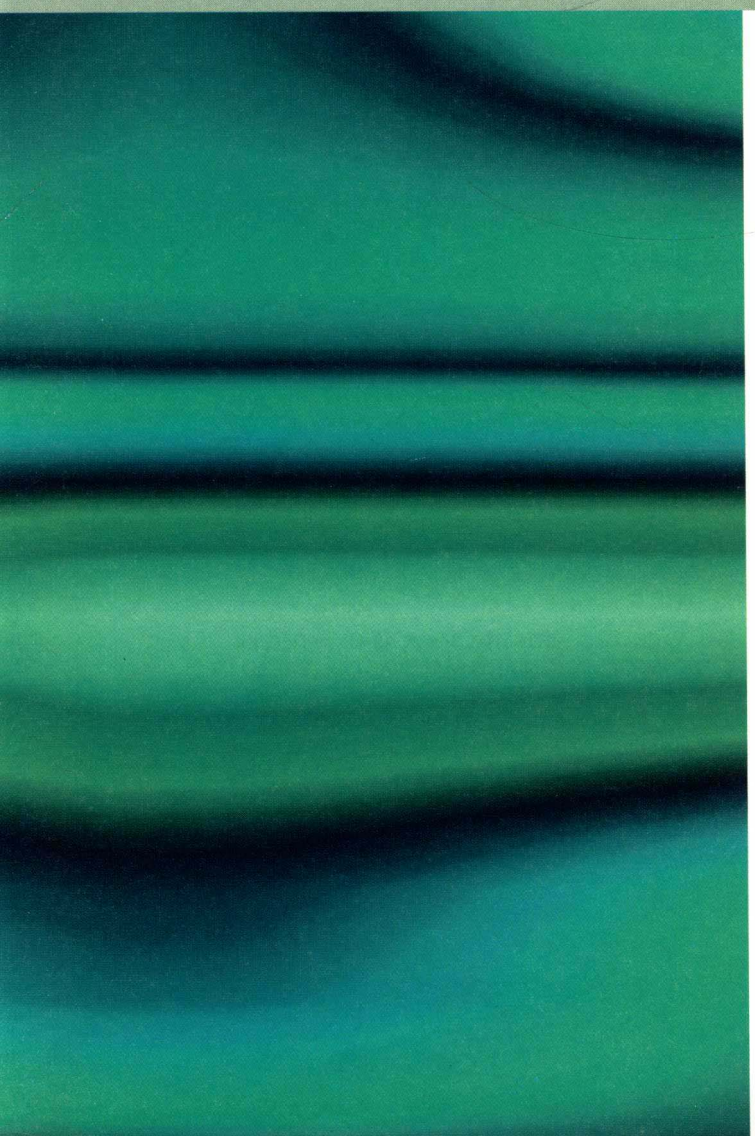
Michael Powers



# How to Program a Virtual Community

Michael Powers



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**This CD** and the software included on it have been designed to run on both Macintosh and Windows systems using a Web browser. System requirements vary depending on what you download from the CD. Please review all software readme files before installing or running any of the software included on this CD.

For more information about this CD please refer to the CD appendix at the back of this book.

## Minimum System Requirements, Macintosh Platform

- Computer: 68030
- Memory: 8MB of RAM
- Platform: System 7.0 or higher
- Software: Web browser
- Hardware: 2X CD-ROM drive

## Windows System Requirements

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- Computer: 386 IBM PC-compatible
- Memory: 8MB of RAM
- Platform: Windows 3.1, NT, or 95
- Software: Web browser
- Hardware: 2X CD-ROM drive

## CD Start Instructions

1. Place the CD-ROM in your CD-ROM drive.
2. Launch your Web browser.
3. From your Web browser, select Open File from the File menu. Select the CD-ROM (usually drive D for PCs and the desktop for Macs ), then select the file called Welcome.htm.

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# How to Program a Virtual Community

**PLEASE NOTE**—USE OF THE DISC AND THE PROGRAMS INCLUDED ON THE DISC PACKAGED WITH THIS BOOK AND THE PROGRAM LISTINGS INCLUDED IN THIS BOOK IS SUBJECT TO AN END-USER LICENSE AGREEMENT (THE "AGREEMENT") FOUND AT THE BACK OF THE BOOK. PLEASE READ THE AGREEMENT CAREFULLY BEFORE MAKING YOUR PURCHASE DECISION. PURCHASE OF THE BOOK AND USE OF THE DISC, PROGRAMS, AND PROGRAM LISTINGS WILL CONSTITUTE ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGREEMENT.

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Dedicated to Dr. Jones and Dr. Driscoll, two educators who gave me the gift of freedom to create.

# Acknowledgments

**Writing a book** takes the contribution of many voices, even if one author appears on the cover. I want to thank the people I worked with over the years who sharpened my thoughts about building and design in computer media. I am grateful to San Francisco State University and my students for the encouragement to develop courses around my twin loves of characters and communities, from which the outline of this book was formed. To Simon Hayes, my acquisitions editor and first contact at Ziff-Davis Press, thank you for everything from shaping the early material into a book outline to calling software vendors for inclusion on the CD—help beyond the call of duty. Angela Allen, my editor who started at ZD Press the same day I did, for continual encouragement through the months of writing. Special thanks to Richard Bartle for historical information about early MUDs and to Keith Elkin for kindly making screen snapshots from videos of his Habitat experiences.

As anyone who has tackled a large project knows, one's own community sees less and less of them over the months, especially as deadlines approach. I am looking forward to seeing more of my friends and supporting them as they have supported me, especially Lisa, Drew, Eli, and Ashia—thanks for café conversation and cappuccinos throughout the writing process.

I would also like to thank my parents for the many phone calls when I needed encouragement.

# Introduction

**The World Wide Web** is in the early stages of an incredible transformation into the World Wide *Community*. No longer is the delivery of information or services the primary value on the Web: Sites are now struggling to form a bond with the people who visit their site to transform them from mere casual visitors into loyal, returning inhabitants. The people are becoming the real value of the Web. With the accelerated rate of change that we know as "Internet time," this sweeping change will transform the Web in a very short time. Right now, Web travelers are searching for places to call home, and right now the popular sites are providing attractive communities where travelers are settling. Right now, your site can become one of these home spaces, developing a loyal following of repeat customers.

If you are involved in development, design, or management of Web sites on the Internet, then this book is for you. You already know that Web sites need every edge in attracting visitors and in keeping them interested in a site. A virtual community will create that attraction, build that loyalty, and give your site that edge. With *How to Program a Virtual Community* you'll learn not only the practical, hands-on skills for running your community software, but also the design skills you need to create a truly attractive and interesting community.

*How to Program a Virtual Community* is the first comprehensive book that reveals the history, building blocks, and design principles for building and managing a virtual community. It is a hands-on guide to the construction of livable virtual communities using affordable software available today. While there are a few books in the marketplace that describe virtual communities, none give Web authors a construction guide for building human-friendly places using easy-to-learn, commercially available tools. This book shows you how to extend your one-way Web site into a dynamic, effective, active community—even if you don't know how to program.

Part 1 of this book is the foundation material that will give you an overview of virtual community design principles, history, and software. Here you will decide which community style is right for your site, and what software you will use to build it. The CD-ROM that accompanies this book contains everything you need to build your community.

Parts 2–7 lead you through the process of designing and creating your virtual community. One by one, the building blocks of community design are described in detail. Each part focuses on a single aspect of your community, taking you from concept to design to implementation in your chosen software package. Once you've chosen the software you will use, you can easily find the chapters that apply to you, and the extensive examples that are included on the CD-ROM. In Part 8 you'll publish your virtual community on the Internet and connect it to your Web site.

In Part 9 you'll find an overview of the fast-paced developments surrounding virtual community software and design, as well as projections about how trends, new features, and new ideas will affect your community. This information will prove invaluable to you as you steer your new community through the rapid developments on the Internet.

As you read this book, keep in mind that any text that is in red will be commands for you to type. The other colors of text are simply used to highlight parts of code or commands to make them easier for you to read. In program listings, words in **boldface** are keywords for you to type exactly as shown. Words in *italics* are placeholders that you should replace with the appropriate value indicated.

At http://www.insideout.net/community/ you'll find links to new virtual community companies as well as additions to the scripts included on the CD. If you have technical questions regarding the use of the CD software, contact techsupport@mcp.zdp.com. I would be very interested to hear about the community you built using this book, so send your comments to me at mpowers@insideout.net. Enjoy the book and your new community!

# Part 1

## What Is a Virtual Community?


Chapter 1: Meeting Your Neighbors in Cyberspace

Chapter 2: Three Types of Communities

Chapter 3: A (Very) Brief History of Virtual Community

Chapter 4: The Five Building Blocks of Virtual Community

Chapter 5: Unique Ideas for Virtual Communities


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# Table of Contents


Introduction xvi

Part 1
What Is a Virtual Community?

Chapter 1
Meeting Your Neighbors in Cyberspace 2
What Is a Virtual Community? 3
How Is a Virtual Community Different from a Web Site? 3
Why You Should Create a Virtual Community 4
Examples of Virtual Communities 5
Why People Want a Virtual Community 6
Summary 7

Chapter 2
Three Types of Community 8
Adventure Seeking in a MUD 9
What Exactly Is a MUD? 9
Is a MUD Right for Your Web Site? 12
Talking in Online Chat Rooms 13
What Exactly Is a Chat Room? 13
Is a Chat Room Right for Your Web Site? 14
Exploring Three-Dimensional Spaces 15
What Exactly Is a 3-D Space? 15
Is a 3-D Space Right for Your Web Site? 16

Chapter 3
A (Very) Brief History of Virtual Community 18
The First MUD 19
The Development of Chats 21
The Habitat Experiment 23
A Virtual Community Timeline 25

Chapter 4
The Five Building Blocks of Virtual Community 26
Inhabitants as Avatars 27
Places to See 28
Things to Do 29
A Government 29
The Economy 30

Chapter 5
Unique Issues for Virtual Communities 32
Stability Is Paramount 33
Maintaining a Community 34

Upgrading Your Community Software 34
Making Up Rules of Behavior 36
What About Free Speech in Virtual Communities? 36

Part 2
Creating a Development Platform for Your Virtual Community 38

Chapter 6: What Software Applications Make a Virtual Community Work? 40

The Three Software Components of Virtual Community 41
The Server + Database 41
The Client Browser 42
The Network Connection 42
How the Components Interrelate 42
Setting Up the Software for Local Development 44
The Right Machine 44
Launching a Server 45
Using the Client 45
Editing Your World 45
Summary 45

Chapter 7
Setting Up the Software for Local Development 46

Preparing to Develop in perlMUD 47
Can perlMUD Run on Your Computer? 47
Setting Up the perlMUD Server 48
Using the perlMUD Client 50
How to Edit the World Decription in perlMUD 52
Preparing to Develop in The Palace 52
Can The Palace Run on Your Computer? 52
Unpacking The Palace Server 53
Running The Palace Server 54
Running The Palace Client 56
How to Create a New Palace World 57
Preparing to Develop in Sony Community Place 57
Can Sony Community Place Run on Your Computer? 57
Setting Up the Sony CP Server 58
Installing the Sony CP Browser Plug-in 59
Running the Sony CP Browser Plug-in 60
How to Edit the World Description in Sony CP 61

Part 3
Avatars: Creating Costumes

Chapter 8: Making Avatars 64

Naming Avatars: Creating an Identity 67
Moving an Avatar 68
Creating a Costume 70
Acting in the Community: Using Props 71
Summary 72

## Chapter 9
## Putting Avatars Together in perlMUD 74

Creating an Avatar 75
- The *@pcreate*, *@password*, and *@name* Commands 75
- The *look* and *@describe* Commands 77
- Setting the Sex of the Avatar 78

Moving an Avatar 80
- Moving Through Exits 80
- Using the *examine* and *@teleport* Commands 81

Avatar Verbs: Using Props in perlMUD 82
- Using the *get* and *drop* Commands 82
- Seeing What You Are Carrying: The *inventory* Command 84

## Chapter 10
## Putting Avatars Together in The Palace 86

Creating an Avatar 87
- Naming an Avatar Using Preferences 87
- Using Avatar Expressions 87
  - Using the Face Palatte 88
  - Typing in a Facial Expression 88

Moving an Avatar 88
- Traveling within a Room 89
- Using Doorways 90
- Teleporting to Palaces and Rooms 90

Avatar Verbs: Using Prop Objects in The Palace 91
- Getting and Dropping Props in a Room 91
- Adding Costume Props to an Avatar 91
- Creating Props 92
- Saving Costumes Using the Macro Command 93

## Chapter 11
## Putting Avatars Together in Sony Community Palace 94

Using Avatars 95
- Naming an Avatar Using Preferences 95
- Choosing an Avatar from the Menu 96
- Using Avatar Expressions 96

Moving an Avatar 97
- Traveling within a Room 97
- Walking, Flying, and Floating 98
- Using Doorways 99
- Teleporting to Other Worlds 99

Creating Avatars 100
- Setting Up the Directories 100
- Making a Body File 102

# Part 4
# Places to Go: Making Great Locations 106

## Chapter 12
## Developing Locations: Virtual Architecture 108

Choosing a Theme 110
- The Purpose of Your Community 110
- The World in a Mall: Borrowing from Real Life 111
- Alternative Themes: Entertainment 112

Architecture for Avatars 112
- Avatar Ergonomics 113

Navigation: Getting from Here to There 114
- Connecting Rooms with Doors and with Other Rooms 115
- Traveling Distances 115
- Maps 116

Handling Traffic and Crowding 117
Making Areas Large Enough 118
Providing More than One Commons Area 119
Avatar Limits 119
Making a Home in the Virtual Community 119
Homesteading 120
Knowing Where Other People Are 120
Summary 121

Chapter 13
Putting Locations Together in perlMUD 122
Choosing a Theme 123
Know Your Tools 123
Setting the Message of the Day 124
Using the welcome.txt File to Provide Log-in Instructions 125
How to Build Places 126
Using *@dig* to Create Rooms 126
Using *@describe* to Describe a Room 127
Setting the Ownership of a Room Using *@chown* 128
Setting the *linkok*, *buildok*, and *jumpok* Flags 128
Design for Navigation 130
Creating an Exit with *@open* and *@describe* 130
Handling Traffic 132
Creating Homes 133
Using *@link* to Give an Avatar a Home 133
Setting the *abode* Flag to Make a Home 134

Chapter 14
Putting Locations Together in The Palace 136
Choosing a Theme
Setting the Entrance Room 137
How to Script a Welcome Message 139
How to Build Places 141
Avatar Sizes 141
Creating Rooms Using the Client Editor 141
Design for Navigation 143
Making Doors Using the Client Editor 144
Common Door Layouts 145
Creating a Panorama 145
Moving Inside Buildings 145
Traveling Outside 147
Handling Traffic 148
Setting Preferences for Maximum Server and Room Occupants 148
Setting Maximum Occupants for a Single Room 149
Getting a Daily Report of Use 150
Creating Homes 150

Chapter 15
Putting Locations Together in Sony Community Place 152
Knowing the Material 153
How to Build Places 154
Creating Rooms and Areas 154
Doors and Archways for Navigation 156
Getting a Daily Report of Use 157

## Part 5
## Things to Do: Making Great Activities 160

## Chapter 16
## Creating Community Activities 162

### Using Props 164
- Props that Provide Room Ambiance 164
- Props as Equipment for Group Activities 166
- Props as Workspace 166
- Prop Generators 167

### Exploring Locations 168
- Exploring Locations: Playing Follow the Leader 168
- Puzzles as a Shared Activity 169
- Barnraising 170

### Conversation 171
- Sending Messages 171
- Displaying Messages 172
- Whispering, Paging, and Broadcasting 173
- Moving While Talking 173

### Developing Roles for Avatars 173
- Creating Temporary Roles 174
- Giving Jobs to Avatars 175
- How to Reward Mentoring 175

### Summary 175

## Chapter 17
## Putting Community Activities Together in perlMUD 178

### Creating and Using Props 179
- Using *@create* to Make Props 179
- Deleting Props with *@recycle* 180
- Setting the Home of a Prop and Making It Stick 181
- How to Give a Prop Away 183
- Creating a Workbook Prop 184

### Exploring Locations 185
- Using *@lock* to Link Props and Doors 185
- Setting Messages with *@fail* and *@succeed* 186
- Creating a Puzzle 187

### Conversation 190
- Sending Messages with *say, emote,* and *whisper* 191
- Finding Out Who Is Available with *who* 192
- Using *page* and *@wall* to Page Others and Broadcast a Message 192

### Developing Roles for Avatars 194
- Wizards as Mentors 194
- Using *@clean* and *@teleport* to Cut Down Room Clutter 194
- Creating a Help File for Newbies 195

## Chapter 18
## Putting Community Activities Together in The Palace 196

### Creating and Using Props 197
- Creating Props 198
- Adding Props to the Server 198
- Creating a Pizza Vending Machine 199
  - Creating a Pizza Warehouse 199
  - Making the Vending Machine 199

### Exploring Locations 201
- Creating a Whiteboard for Drawing 201
- Different Types of Doors 202
  - Spot 203
  - Passage 203
  - Shutable 204
  - Lockable 204
  - Dead Bolt 204
  - Nav Area 204

Creating a Maze 204
Conversation 210
Sending Messages to Others 210
Looking for Commands in Messages 211
Developing Roles for Avatars 214
Distinguishing between Foundation Roles 214

Chapter 19
Putting Community Activities Together in Sony Community Place 216

Exploring Locations 217
Making a Launching Pad 217
Creating a 3-D Maze 218
Creating a Tower 219
Conversation 220
Sending Messages to Others 220
Using Gestures on the Action Panel 220

Part 6
Managing Your New Community 222

Chapter 20
How to Manage Your Community 224

Choosing a Form of Government 226
Democracy vs. Dictatorship 226
Personal Community 227
Membership Community 228
Sponsored Community 228
For-Profit Community 229
Avoiding the One Dollar Equals One Vote Syndrome 230
Online Time 231
Revenue 232
Creative Service 232
Feedback 232
Control and Monitoring 233
Social Contracts 233
Providing Censorship Tools 236
Wizards and Hosts 237
Managing the Growth Rate 238
Handling Resources 238
From One to One Thousand Inhabitants 238
Concept 239
Beta 239
Launch 239
Outreach 239
Adolescence 239
Definition 240
Maturity 240
Possibilities 241
Summary 241

Chapter 21
Managing Your perlMUD Community 242

Forging Links with Your Community 244
Avatars and Props as Added Value 244
Supporting a Community Newspaper 245
Using a Book as a Voting Booth 247
Using E-mail for Feedback 248
Filtering and Wizards 248
Publishing the Social Contract 250
Making an Inhabitant into a Wizard 250
Wizard Crowd Control Commands 250
Using *@boot* to Disconnect an Inhabitant 252
Using *@toad* and lockouts.txt to Remove an Inhabitant 252
Monitoring Population Growth 253

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