

Virtual estates lead to real-world headaches

[Technology](#), [Information Technology](#)



The paper “ Virtual Estates Lead To Real-World Headaches” is an excellent example of an essay on information technology.

Virtual real estate emerged out of the rapid technological advancement in the internet. Virtual goods in the US alone are estimated to exceed \$1 billion in 2009, said the Inside Virtual Goods analyst, but the global value is pegged at five or six times higher (Nicholson). At an agreed price, virtual properties can be owned. But upon non-payment of a maintenance fee, a virtual property can be erased without a trace. This happened to a virtual couple who established a house on an island in Second Life. When the husband avatar died and the wife avatar cannot comply with the maintenance fees, all that they have put up were totally gone (six months after the death).

The terms of usage in the virtual reality set it apart from the real world since the mediator or platform creator and owner of the virtual environment remains to have control if not total ownership of the contents in the website. This scenario occurs in other social networking sites such as YouTube and MySpace. Access and control are essential features in a virtual environment, according to Deven R. Desai (a fellow from Center for Information Technology Policy, Princeton University, New Jersey and professor, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, California). In the case of a soldier killed in Iraq in 2004, his family was denied the password to his email account by Yahoo to access his correspondence. A court ruling finally ordered Yahoo to give the documents to his family a year after. Denial of access to other persons though can be justified on account of privacy.

Access may be a problem after the death of the user. Thus, innovations are introduced wherein the user is asked to choose between deletion of the

account or access, and if the latter is chosen, an executor is named.

Continued access to the user's account is more humane as this perpetuates the memory of the deceased. Facebook allowed family members and friends to post condolences and grieve over the death of a Virginia Tech shooting victim in 2006 (usual practice before that is the deletion of the account once a death certificate is presented).

Studying the new modes people utilize to relate to each other, Michael Wesch (cultural anthropologist, Kansas State University) said that "there is great potential for the traces left behind to speak to future generations" (Nicholson 2). He added that court cases abound in the past on the best way to preserve cultural heritage, and the future should consider the management of this type of information. Indeed, the memories or traces should be preserved as part of the cultural heritage of the virtual community.