

# There.com

## Makena Technologies creates an imaginative and playful world

by Pollywog Gardenvale

### Minimum Requirements (PC only):

- Windows Vista, XP, 2000
- 256MB RAM
- 56k Internet connection
- 500MB free hard disc space
- Graphics card requirements:  
NVIDIA: Any GeForce or better, with 32MB of VRAM  
ATI: Any ATI Radeon 7200 or better, with 32MB of VRAM  
Other brands: Any graphics card that supports hardware transform and lighting, with 32MB of RAM

Makena Technologies is the developer of There.com, an online virtual world that is designed for young people to make friends, play games, make things, and develop their social and entrepreneurial skills.

The company has a long and impressive history—at least as far as can be said for any company in the virtual world market. The more I learned, the more I came to realize that you can't fully understand There.com without also considering its sister company, Forterra Systems, Inc. They're connected and it's impossible to appreciate one without the other.

The company that is now known as Forterra Systems was founded in 1998 as the Silicon Valley startup, There, Inc. The company developed a proprietary platform called OLIVE, (Online Interactive Virtual Environment) which is used for building 3D environments. In 2004, the company landed a four-year \$3.5 million contract with the U.S. Army. The following year the company spun off its entertainment division as Makena Technologies, under the direction of There, Inc. board member Michael Wilson. The core development company was renamed Forterra Systems and continues to develop high-end, vertical 3D environments for government, health care, education, and business.

Michael Wilson, as founder and CEO of the newly-formed Makena Technologies, had previously played a key role in the success of eBay and brought to the table his years of experience in the fields of eCommerce, point-of-sale, and online community building, as well as a savvy sense of what it takes to structure, brand, leverage, and position the product as a commercially-viable enterprise.



There is a carefully crafted world that is suitable for a PG-13 audience.

Strategic partnerships and branded builds for companies such as MTV, Capitol Music Group, and Scion make Makena Technologies a serious player in the virtual world marketplace.

On October 29th, the Humane Society of the United States announced a partnership with There.com to celebrate animals and combat cruelty. All proceeds from the sale of Humane Society branded merchandise will be donated to an educational, non-profit organization, founded by Michael Wilson. So it's not all about making a buck—or a Therebuck as the case may be.

In another strategic alliance, CosmoGIRL! Village is scheduled to open on November 20, 2007. Michael Wilson sums it up by saying, "There.com is all about fashion, socialization and shared activities, which aligns perfectly with the main interests of CosmoGIRL!'s readers."

Unlike Second Life, which is—depending on your point of view—either a celebration or a hodgepodge of user created content, There.com is a carefully crafted world that is suitable for a PG-13 rated audience. The average age of the typical user is twenty-two years old and more than half are female.

The interface, visual effects, and animations are consistently proportioned with common themes in a distinctive style that is reminiscent of Disney. The animation is delightful to watch as your avatar actually breathes and goes through a whole range of natural ges-

tures and facial expressions. Work of this caliber doesn't happen by chance.

Although most of the objects that you see in-world were not created by users, there is a large selection of user-generated content that is available for purchase from the online catalog.

Before anything can be placed in the world, it must first pass a content review process to ensure that it falls within the guidelines for what is considered acceptable and does not contain any copyrighted material. These guidelines include minimum avatar coverage requirements and prohibit any reference to drugs, or the depiction of blood, guts, and gore. But even with such restrictions, it's good to see that the censors aren't being overly prudish—as indicated by the selection of lingerie and other not-quite-risque apparel. It is a fine line to walk.

After an item passes content review, it can be offered for sale in an e-Bay style catalog of products. One nice feature is the ability to try an item for five minutes without being charged. Many items can also be rented rather than purchased. When an item is purchased, There.com deducts the predetermined wholesale price and passes the difference on to the seller. It's run like a business and yes, they actually do take a cut of each item sold.

All items are purchased with Therebucks (T\$), the official currency of



COSMO  
girl!

There  
Capitol.



Trying on some retro cat-eye glasses



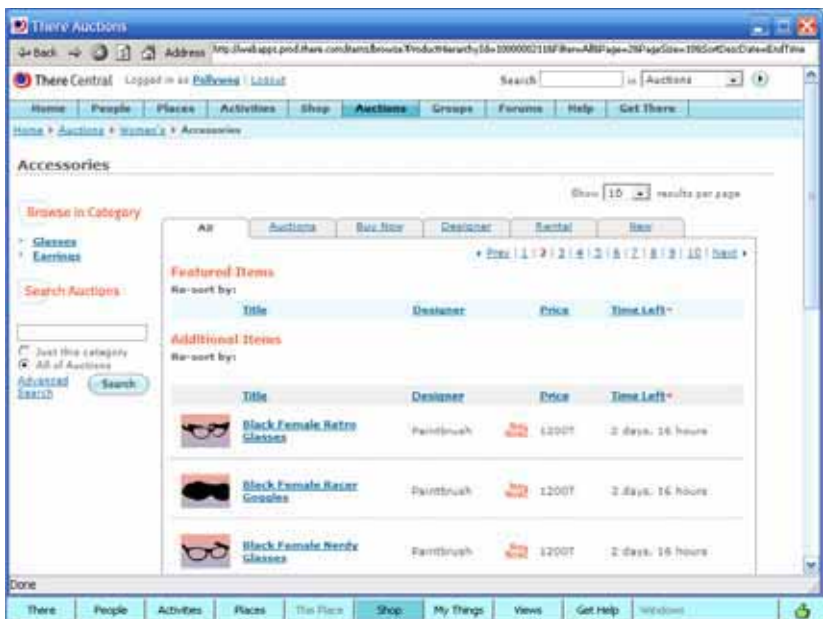
Taking a sip of some Root Burp.



Woops!



Excuse me!



There's eBay-inspired auction catalog

## ►There

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There.com. The current exchange rate is T\$1,800 Therebucks to \$1 USD. In contrast, the current Second Life exchange rate for Lindens (\$L) is 265 to \$1 USD.

I bought a few basic items and compared them to comparable purchases in Second Life. Then I calculated the value of each in USD. I found that, for my purchases at least, There.com was about twice as expensive as Second Life. Here's what I bought:

	Therebucks	\$USD
Hair	3,250	1.80
Eyes	1,125	.62
Lipstick	925	.54
Top	3,500	1.94
Pants	2,500	1.39
Flip-Flops	1,250	.69
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$6.97</b>

Right now the selection of clothing is rather limited, but will undoubtedly change when CosmoGIRL! Village opens later this month.

There.com also provides access to painting and building tools that can be used to create clothing and accessories, houses and other items—most of which are based on a set of predefined templates. The size of each item, the number of polygons, vertices, and collisions allowed, as well as the resolution of the textures are all predetermined to manage the resource load on the system.

For example, to make a chair, you can begin with a basic chair template and use the Painter Kit to change the color or texture. There is a 9,500T fee to submit your creation for content review, and the wholesale price is preset to 400T. This translates to \$5.27 USD to submit the item, with a wholesale price of 22 cents. The one-time submission fee covers the cost of the review process, but

also serves to filter out the more casual content creators.

On my first day in There, (after buying some cuter clothes and make-up), I invited myself to a party and learned how to chat. The next day, I went exploring and learned how to use the hoverboard I bought a bottle of Root Burp from a soda machine and played around with gestures. There's also a make-over spa that I'd like to check out, but I'll have to do that another day.

There.com has a reward/incentive system that tracks your "social and creative" experiences, and already I have achieved the level of "Avid Fashionista." While looking at someone's profile, I discovered that she is a "Legendary Fashionista" and a member of many groups, so I can see that I have a way to go before I qualify as a true Thereian.

There are many opportunities for members to participate in group activities and social events, including:

- Teams & Leagues
- Businesses
- Social & Recreational Clubs
- Neighborhoods & Households

Parents can rest assured that time spent in There is not likely to be spent in isolation, but rather in developing social skills that can be applied to the real world.

Just as real world CosmoGIRLS are on the migration path to become full-blown supermarket checkout line, pick up the latest Cosmopolitan (or at least check out the headlines) readers, I suspect that at some point, most residents in There.com will be ready to move on to something a little more edgy and sophisticated. And when that happens, Makena Technologies has just the place for them: A multitude of MTV Virtual Worlds where you can "live the MTV life, meet thousands, party with celebs and shop for the hottest gear! Don't just watch it, live it!" Cha-ching! ☘