



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**LOCATION:**  
*New York, NY, US*

**ORGANIZATION:**  
BrandGames

**YEAR:**  
*2011*

**ORGANIZATION URL:**  
<http://www.brandgames.com>

**STATUS:**  
*Laureate*

**PROJECT NAME:**  
Virtual Team Challenge

**CATEGORY:**  
*Training/Education*

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Beginning in high school, and sometimes earlier, young people start thinking about potential career paths. While many professions (legal, medical, military, science, the arts) receive exposure through television, films and other mass media, it can be difficult for students who are interested in business to get an inside look at the world of business. While some students may be able to pick up some information about a business career from friends and family, students in rural and low-income areas, especially, may have limited opportunities to do so. The Virtual Team Challenge (VTC) is the first ever 3D avatar-based multi-player Business Simulation operated as an outreach program to high school students throughout the US. Offered at no cost to schools, the VTC curriculum program has served more than 40,000 students and 2,000 teachers in hundreds of schools across all 50 states. The program enables high school juniors and seniors to explore the business world first-hand and challenges them to participate in, and navigate, complex business scenarios as they prepare for higher education and a vocation. VTC presents student-teams with a multifaceted business problem based on a current news theme that resonates with young people – the management of an oil spill cleanup. Teams work diligently over the course of seven weeks to organize, strategize and collaborate to help New City recover from the environmental disaster – and the clock is ticking. The program teaches students business skills –negotiating, critical thinking, teamwork and problem solving – that prepare them for business and life as they compete with other high schools nationally. Teachers are provided with in-class curriculum materials including terms to teach, conversation guides, real-life negotiation/business examples, a grading rubric, instructional videos, student worksheets, quizzes, and telephone technical support. There were challenges in developing and managing VTC - mostly having to do with it being the first program of its kind in U.S. schools: -VTC was conceived to run as a homework assignment but quickly evolved into an in-class curriculum as a result of strong teacher interest in the program. VTC was redesigned architecturally to accommodate a diverse set of firewall, security and operational requirements to operate in the classroom. -Approval and buy-in is required by teachers and school

administrators, which can be difficult for a curriculum that is completely outside of the norm and foreign to teachers and administrators. A VTC team is assembled twice annually to contact schools/teachers, and sign up new schools and teachers. -VTC has to appeal to, and engage, students who are playing commercially available video games developed by large companies like Microsoft and Electronic Arts. To overcome this challenge, VTC features 60 unique 3D locations, 100 unique non-player characters and over 6000 lines of branching dialog voiced by character voice-over actors and contain story elements of interest to students such as recording studios, restaurants, and other things they see or would like to have in their everyday lives. VTC registration continues to grow acclimating more students to business, and providing teachers and schools an exciting way to deliver education.

## **SOCIETAL BENEFITS**

1. Expands thinking of teachers/administrators about how to reach/engage students of the game/simulation era 2. Helps students understand the importance of education, business skills, business acumen 3. Creates a stronger student-teacher bond and mutual understanding 4. Provides schools with a technologically advanced curriculum program that is well outside school budgets

## **PREVIOUS PROJECT UPDATED/EXPANDED?**

This is the first submission of VTC

## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETE?**

Yes

## **PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE**

VTC will have a positive, lasting effect on students as it creates a learning environment they can relate to immediately. Ethics, responsibility, integrity, respect, and self-confidence are all part of business – as well as life. Teachers connect with students in a way like never before. They can see what motivates, inspires and engages students to absorb educational material. The following quotes provide a glimpse into the impact this program has had at the individual levels:

- “When I first started teaching, I used to dream of doing all kinds of engaging and creative programs like this. But after 34 years, things get in the way – budgets, planning, approvals. But finally, I feel like I’m doing exactly what I wanted to do as a teacher.” Mary Cantow, Teacher Stamford HS, CT
- “I took it home the other day and told my brother I get to play a video game for school...It is very entertaining. I never knew business could be so fun.” Wesley Edmonds, student Avon HS, IN
- “What better way to apply business skills to these students than a simulation that deals with ethics, communication and teamwork?” Kyle Park, Teacher Zionsville Community HS, IN
- “This is a technology-based generation that we are teaching, so this game really engages them. I have even had kids wanting to come in before my first-period class to work on it. I could never get kids to do that with any other project before, but to them, this is fun” Kyle Park, Teacher Zionsville Community HS, IN
- “Thank you! My kids are really into it. I, personally must get more familiar. This is an opportunity for top students in the class to be challenged beyond where they are in the class and I particularly like the problem-solving... critical thinking and decision-making they must do. It is an experiment in differentiation. Thank you!” Donna Gavitt, Teacher Selinsgrove Area HS, PA
- “The simulation was a perfect match for what I was teaching. You want the kids to get out into the world of work through internships, to job-shadow. This is pretty much the same thing, except they don’t have to leave the classroom.” o Lenore Mullady, Teacher o Pathways to Technology HS, CT
- “AWESOME! What a wonderful experience for my students. We are ready for the next challenge!



Thanks for making this opportunity available for these brilliant young people.”  
o Sherry P. King, Chairman, Business Department o Curie Metropolitan HS, IL • “My students are absolutely loving this SPILL! challenge. They walk in to class, grab their folders and immediately jump in to their virtual worlds. Thanks.”  
o Anna Ellington, Teacher o Kinnelon High School, NJ

## **IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE?** Yes

### **ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION**

In the current economic climate, schools across the country are experiencing drastic budget cuts. In these schools, Virtual Team Challenge has remained a constant due to its commitment to providing absolutely free curriculum programming that is proven and demonstrates value to schools, students and teachers alike. By 2010, student registration jumped from 3000 in 23 states to over 10,000 representing all 50 states. A large portion of Virtual Team Challenge’s growth is attributed to valuable partnerships that have been developed with key organizations that specialize in the promotion and distribution of business education content. VTC has benefitted from endorsements from the National Business Education Association (as well as the IBEA, MPBEA, WBEA, NJBEA, and others), SCORE (Service Corps Of Retired Executives), Virtual Enterprise, iLearn Technology, and others. - SPILL! attracted increased attention in the wake of the Gulf Coast oil spill. The program, which was launched in 2008 was suddenly and coincidentally made even more relevant by current events and was featured on several installments of WebTechTalk, an online radio program that highlights environmental and ecological curriculum tools. -The story of the Virtual Team Challenge program has resonated with members of the media, who are intrigued by the use of ‘Videogames’ in high school classrooms and impressed with the effectiveness of the games medium to communicate curriculum material. The program has been featured in The New York Times, Washington Post, CBS News, Denver Post, Indianapolis Star and dozens of other publications who have taken the time to visit participant schools to see the simulations in action and obtain first-hand quotes from students, teachers and administrators who have improved their schools through the use of the program. Examples of VTC in the media are available below: - New York Times Link - <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/07/nyregion/07avatar.html> - CBS News Link - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6BkyGtQnQ8> - Washington Post Link - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/03/AR2009010301556.html>