

Kid-friendly MMO MyMiniPeeps gets \$300,000 (in real-world currency)

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Aficionados of popular video game *World of Warcraft* will tell you that, despite the game's reputation for being more addictive than drugs, it has redeeming value in team building and the pursuit of goals. But it's hard to justify that when everyone's killing each other.

Enter *MyMiniPeeps*, a Massive Multiplayer Online game intended specifically for children ages 6 through 13. Masher Media, the game's developer, just received \$300,000 in angel funding from Tech Coast Angels to keep working towards a pre-alpha release. The company had previously raised \$175,000 in a seed round and hopes to get another \$200,000 for this round.

There's no shortage of venues for kids to get their gaming kicks these days, but Masher Media chief executive Sherry Gunther said she knows of no existing game that combines the deep play of an MMO with a friendly, positive atmosphere.

A typical objective in *MyMiniPeeps* might entail rescuing a cat from a tree or going on a scavenger hunt. These quests could lead to new missions, but they also give the player in-game currency and goodwill points. These are used to build up the player's character and unlock new abilities.

The game allows parents to limit the time their kids spend playing, approve of buddy list additions, and sign off on uploads for user-created content. The game prohibits the sharing of personal information.

MyMiniPeeps has filters and human moderators to prevent bullying and foul language. *MyMiniPeeps* will also work on positive attitudes by getting kids to work together on quests, and by giving them objectives that mirror real-world goals, like recycling and planting trees. Additionally, players can vote for a real charity to receive some of their in-game currency, and Masher Media will pay actual money to the winning charity.

The business model will be subscription-based, at a price of \$5.95 per month with discounts for long-term subscriptions, but Gunther said microtransactions and branded virtual merchandise will also help the site monetize. Masher Media currently employs 5 full-time employees for the game and uses contractors for programming and art.

As with any game, the biggest factor in its success will be how fun it is. We'll see if *MyMiniPeeps* can lure children to more positive gaming pastures when it launches in Fall 2010.