

WING COMMANDER PRIVATEER™



TEEN
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AGES 13+
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Douglas 92

ORIGIN™
We create worlds™

Pitch

Created by the Privateer Online Team.

Working Title: Privateer Online.

High Concept:

A massively multiplayer online game featuring space combat, planetary colonization, and a strong player-driven economy set in the *Privateer* universe.

Back of the Box (1 page):

- Space combat featuring a wide array of ship types and ship upgrades. Modular ships let you mix and match parts to make the vessel of your dreams.
- Ground-based game that enables homesteading, resource mining, and adventuring on planet surfaces.
- 3d accelerated graphics that make use of the latest technology, but are also scaleable to lower-end machines
- A server architecture that supports literally millions of unique planet maps, by using a random map generation routine that uses a fixed random seed. Maps are taken down and brought up again on the fly based on whether players are currently visiting the planet.
- Integrated web browser and email capabilities so that the game community is at your fingertips.
- Fully customizable figures with a full array of clothing and armor, plus animations for a variety of social actions (hugging, waving, curtsies, etc).
- Combat against an incomprehensible and horrid race of aliens that is competing against us for galactic colonization.
- A wide range of 3d terrain and environments, including several terrain types for surface planets, plus underwater, surface of water, gaseous, and no-atmosphere planets.
- A very wide range of player buildable installations, all of which require ongoing costs, but which take up far less database space than is currently required by *UO* housing.
- A stock market that is based on buying stock in the endeavors of other players and their guilds. This market is fully viewable from the web, and transactions can also occur there.
- A commodities market which uses a delayed auction system, allowing transactions to occur while offline.
- A robust player guild system that easily enables players to work together.
- Deep support for "non-combat" play styles, including merchant types, socializers, artists, and community builders.
- A party system for easily adventuring with your friends.

- Numerous ladders for achievement. Every profession and company type ranked separately, as well as ranked together in terms of annual profit. Social players can measure their success against others of their type.
- Easily accessible global chat, messaging at a distance, and other communication facilities.
- SYSTRAN translator feature incorporated as a visible and functional part of the game.

Business Model (½ to 1 page):

Revenue Generation:

The revenue generated for PO will come from both box sales and subscription. The subscription fee will be \$9.95 per month. The anticipated number of overall subscribers is close to 400,000. Our goal is to keep the planned support costs per subscriber to around \$6.00. A couple of ways we see keeping our backend costs down are:

- Developing a scalable server farms with reasonable bandwidth consumption. Our current plan is to not exceed 1.2kb/sec/user average sustained bandwidth (See Top Risks for more details about bandwidth challenges).
- Easy, robust backend support tools for Player Relations.
- Better metrics to measure performance

We are investigating ways to increase revenue per subscriber. One idea is to have Specialty Shards. These shards would have a higher per month subscription fee than regular shards. They would contain additional features like audio chat and streaming music/audio. We could offer a different kind of support as well.

Ancillary Revenue:

Building upon one of the most recognized franchises in the history of computer entertainment, PO represents a unique opportunity to explore additional sources of revenue:

- Corporate-sponsored in-game billboards
- Sponsored player lists, such as the "Fortune Magazine Top 20 Richest Players"
- In-game links to real-world services, such as ordering Domino's pizza without having to exit the game
- Sponsored quests and contests
- Products to sell in the online PO store. These products could range from t-shirts to posters.
- Potential Licensing deals with toy manufacturers like Hasbro to develop customized action figures based on the player's characters and ships

Keeping PO Fresh:

In order to keep the game alive long beyond its initial release, both the story and the technology must continue to evolve – in small steps or in great leaps – throughout the life of the product. PO will be designed from the outset with

tools that enable events, artwork, ships, objects, and new technology to be quickly and seamlessly integrated into the product. In addition, the game's design will plan for additional releases. The first release is planned for 12 months after ship.

Projects P&L

			FY02	FY03	2yr TOTAL	NOTES
<i>RETAIL</i>						
UNITS			305,000	170,000	475,000	
REVENUE	Net	\$	9,612,000	\$ 4,144,500	\$ 13,756,500	* 1
COGS	\$ 5.80	\$	1,769,000	\$ 986,000	\$ 2,755,000	
Other COGS	7.50%	\$	720,900	\$ 310,838	\$ 1,031,738	
Royalties	25.00%	\$	403,000	\$ 1,036,125	\$ 1,439,125	* 2
	\$ 0.05	\$	15,250	\$ 8,500	\$ 23,750	
CONTR. MARGIN		\$	6,703,850	\$ 1,803,038	\$ 8,506,888	
			70%	44%	62%	
<i>SUBSCRIPTIONS</i>						
AVG SUBSCRIBERS			129,780	173,000		
REV/SUBSCRIBER		\$	9.95	\$ 9.95		
NET		\$	13,951,890	\$ 18,563,715	\$ 32,515,605	
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AGGREGATE CM		\$	13,679,795	\$ 11,084,895	\$ 24,764,690	
			58%	49%	54%	

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
290	300	305	310	315	320	325	330	335	340	345	350	355	360	365
297	303	308	313	318	323	328	333	338	343	348	353	358	363	368
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
175	178	181	184	187	190	193	196	199	202	205	208	211	214	217

Assumptions in these forecasts are:

- Worldwide simultaneous release in as many languages as we have localization people to translate and implement. It should not be a technical issue of language support, but instead a workload issue. To have a what is considered a worldwide launch, we are assuming 6 languages at this time (Japanese, German, French, Korean, Chinese, Spanish) (see Other Considerations).
- A monthly subscription of \$9.95 per month, with no multi-month discounts assumed.

OVERALL			
DEV SPENDING			
DEV	\$	6,182,915	*3
LIVE	\$	800,000	
TRANSITION			
OTHER SG&A	\$	3,709,749	
TTL SG&A	\$	10,692,664	
PROFIT	\$	14,072,026	
		57%	

NOTES:

1. * Retail is for boxes sold in retail stores that will include a first month free.
2. First year excludes \$2M paid in advances against royalties
3. 'includes \$2M advance paid to SIMIS in 2 installments

For more detailed information please see the enclosed Privateer Topline Excel spreadsheet.

Marketing Pitch (½ to 1 page):

We are awaiting full materials from Marketing based on their review of this pitch and of the attached Vision document. Their preliminary forecasts are:

Month	May FY01	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WW sell in	150	175	200	225	240	255	270	280
WW sell thru	98	131	150	169	180	217	230	238
New/Renew accts	98	34	19	19	11	37	13	9
Churn	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	8%	8%
Active subs	0	98	131	143	155	159	183	181

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
290	300	305	310	410	415	425	440	445	450	455	460	465	470	475
247	255	259	264	349	353	361	374	378	383	387	391	395	400	404
9	9	4	4	85	4	9	13	4	4	0	4	4	4	4
8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%
175	169	164	155	147	220	207	199	196	184	174	160	151	144	136

Assumptions in these forecasts are:

- Worldwide simultaneous release in as many languages as we have localization people to translate and implement. It should not be a technical issue of language support, but instead a workload issue. To have a what is considered a worldwide launch, we are assuming 6 languages at this time (Japanese, German, French, Korean, Chinese, Spanish) (see Other Considerations).
- A monthly subscription of \$9.95 per month, with no multi-month discounts assumed.

- A \$36 wholesale price start, with a drop to \$30 after 6 months, and a drop to \$13.50 after 24 months.
- A sell through lift in November and December.
- A full upgrade available after 12 months, which replaced the original SKU (see Other Considerations). A free upgrade is available to existing subscribers, and the new SKU is priced at the existing wholesale price.
- Does not assume OEM or Mac opportunities.
- Does not assume ancillary revenue from UOStore-like opportunities.
- Does not assume Gametime coupons.

Top Risks (1-2 pages):

These are sorted in order from greatest risk to least.

External engine development

Risk: Relying on an external developer to provide the core of the graphics technology for Privateer Online.

Solution: Bryan Walker's prior experience with Simis mitigates this risk, as will the possible addition of at least one programming team member (Francine Hunter) with extensive knowledge of their technology. Bryan will be responsible for communicating constantly with Simis, and Francine Hunter could help implement PO-specific changes to the engine, as well as train other team members on the technology. Video conferencing with Simis via the EA Guildford office bridge is allegedly easy to organize. OSI will also maintain the source code server and version control within our offices.

Short timeline

Risk: Implementing a massively-multiplayer fully-persistent world internet-based game in less than two years has never been accomplished before.

Solution(s): Begin the project with mature, stable, and scalable technology and maximize productivity with parallel internal and external development efforts. We must also be realistic as we proceed: we cannot set targets for time, quality and cost and expect them all to be hit. Any two of those dictates the third, and it is up to the approval body to decide which two factors are most important to them.

Internet latency and bandwidth restrictions

Risk: The inherent latency of internet communications coupled with a 1.2 kilobyte/second bandwidth restriction will make it challenging to support a large number of players in a localized area while still providing a smooth and enjoyable space flight experience.

Solution: Server-side culling will prioritize objects based on metrics such as proximity, threat assessment, and visibility. The server will transmit information to each client based on prioritization, until either all important object information is transmitted, or a given bandwidth restriction is reached. Although the ground portion of the game is more latency and bandwidth tolerant, any solution that improves the space flight experience can also help make the ground experience more enjoyable.

Combining space and ground into one engine--integrating kinematics into external flight engine

Risk: Supporting both a high-resolution surface and character interaction system as well as a full six degree of freedom simulation-oriented combat system with a single application.

Solution: The Simis engine is already easily capable of supporting the space combat feature set of Privateer Online with minimal modification. However, modification via the integration of the Ultima Online 2 animation system will be required to provide a more believable and immersive character-oriented environment.

New game mechanics

Risk: Certain elements of the game design are new and untested mechanics. Specifically, the advancement model, the economic model, and the stock market are new to online games.

Solution: The untested mechanics are also some of the key appeals of the design. We intend to do prototypes and to paper-game the portions of the design that can be tested that way, so that we have some solid sense of how these elements will fit into the game as we go into the DDR and TDR.

Heavy use of the web in the game design

Risk: The need to shunt the bulk of the low-bandwidth game segments to the web in order to reduce the server/communication costs.

Solution(s): Acquisition of a dedicated CGI/Java programmer for Privateer Online, or dedicated support from the OSI web group.

Art production

Risk: The need to quickly establish a look and feel for the game, as well as properly evaluate the scheduling issues for the entire scope of the artwork.

Solution: The rapid acquisition of a Lead Artist, as well as the potential for securing external contract work if need be.

Team

Risk: recruitment for key positions on the team may prove difficult given the relative lack of experienced people in the industry. The cancellation of the A-10 project leaves us with a large number of candidates who, if brought on, will be coming into the team at an earlier stage than anticipated. Lastly, there is always the risk of departures from the team.

Solution: We have already begun the process of recruiting and interviewing, and we have a list of candidates for the key positions. We intend to be very careul about who we bring on from the A-10 team, to ensure that the individuals who join the *PO* team are of highest caliber and those who are best able to contribute in the early stages of the game design. Lastly, in terms of departures, we will work to make sure that there is no role on the team for which we do not have a backup, so that the loss of a given individual does not shut down production in that particular area of the team.

"Two games"

Risk: we are attempting to create a design that bridges both the online roleplaying game and the space simulation. We run the risk of having it feel like two separate games, or of not doing a thorough enough job on either part of the game.

Solution: We intend to have only one lead designer so that the game vision is seen as a unified whole. In addition, we intend to interweave the elements of space and ground to such a degree that each is seen as inseparable from the other. The RPG-style advancement model will apply to elements of space flight, and space flight will be vital to successfully building the ground-based colonies up.

Crossover sim-RPG audience

Risk: the fact that the game is a hybrid of both space sim and roleplaying game may lead to a conflict in the audience attracted to the game.

Solution: we believe that ultimately, the retention factors in *Privateer Online* will be the same as for all online games: a sense of community and a sense of ownership. This is more easily represented in the ground portion of the design than in space. We believe that the design we have begun will capture the interest of both parties. In addition, we will work with Marketing to ensure that the presentation of *Privateer Online* to the public is that of a whole universe, a galaxy with many different styles of play supported.

Potential big license competition

Risk: Digital Anvil's *Freelancer* is due to ship shortly after *Privateer Online*, published by Microsoft. In addition, we know that Kesmai has begun design on a *Star Trek Online*. Lastly, LucasArts has *Star Wars Online* under serious consideration.

Solution: Two of these are big licenses that could take a significant amount of mindshare away from our game. Digital Anvil currently has Rich Lawrence (who Gordon highly regards). LucasArts, while significantly lacking in online expertise, can easily entice top talent to come and work on Star Wars. Current management at Kesmai does not inspire confidence in their ability to complete their project. Our tack will be to focus on gameplay and on the lessons learned from *UO*. Aspects of the design like the strong community elements, integration with the web, and support for social professions within the game are unique to our vision, and we will emphasize them to provide differentiation and greater depth to the game.

Fulfillment of Commander's Intent (1-2 pages):

1. Product

- a. **Platform:** Windows 98/2000
- b. **Type of game:** Online only. 2 paths of development. The Commander's Intent requested two proposals, with the optimal path that we release ground based and space based integrated engines in the initial release. Because of the complexity of developing 2 separate styles of gameplay, this presents a huge challenge and one that we must approach carefully so

that we do not rush both of them. The space engine will likely be developed by Simis, an external group based in the UK. This presents even more challenges. Despite these challenges, this is the proposal we are presenting. The 2nd development path is to release the ground game first with design hooks already in place for when the space engine is completed.

- c. **Fiction:** Wing Commander universe
- d. **Audience:** Online RPGers, strategy gamers, space sim gamers.

2. Resources

- a. **When to start?:** Most of the core team available to start DDR after we receive approval on our Pitch. Currently lacking Art Director.
- b. **When to ship?:** March 2001 requested Commanders' Intent date and what marketing believes is the optimal date for shipping, mostly driven by expected ship date of Freelancer, as well as budgetary pressures. If we do a 2 stage launch (ground and then space), we have yet to determine when the 2nd stage would come out but I would put as a goal not more than 6 months after.
- c. **Personnel for DDR:** Refer to the Preproduction Schedule and Budget.
- d. **Budget:** Refer to the budget spreadsheet.

The areas of the Commanders' Intent that have not been fulfilled are:

- **Date:** We believe that the date of March 2001 is not achievable. Refer to the Preproduction Schedule and Budget for discussion on this.
- **Marketing:** We've only received a forecast and still owes us as part of this pitch the target audience and planned marketing budget. They will present this at our pitch meeting.
- **Single vs 2 stage release:** If we integrate the ground game tightly with the space game (eg. what you do on the ground affects space and space affects the ground), then separating the 2 into separate releases is really not possible and would make the ground based game seem incomplete.

Preproduction Schedule and Budget (½ page):

TASK	TIME	START	END
DDR	8 w	7/8/99	9/1/99
TDR	9 w	9/2/99	11/3/99
Full production - 16 months	68 w	11/4/99	2/21/01
Public Alpha test	12 w	2/22/01	5/16/01
Final production	2 w	5/17/01	5/30/01
Public Beta test	3 w	5/31/01	6/20/01
Localizations	3 w	6/21/01	7/11/01
LIVE		7/12/01	7/12/01

Note that these are all guesstimates based upon a fairly perfect world (no one quits, we get staffing when we need, etc...) and also based upon past experiences.

Times are subject to change pending minimum feature set needed to produce a quality game, flushed out DDR and TDR and more flushed out task list / schedule. Note that our schedule preliminary schedule puts us out at July, 2001, 4 months past the Commanders' Intent date.

DDR - 8 weeks to get us to a 9/3/99 submission. Discussion meeting to be held 1-2 weeks after.

TDR - 9 weeks to get us to a 10/29/99 submission. Discussion meeting to be held 1-2 weeks after. Since there is no final TDR format, this 9 weeks is just an estimate. But, with us already having 2 key programmers on the project that can start now, we feel confident that this is a doable timeframe.

Full production - 16 months. This time will include 2 alpha tests.

Public Alpha Test - 12 weeks. Will be done after full production. All features are complete, pending changes we want to make that come up during this testing phase.

Final Production - 2 weeks. This is time used to finish up any changes necessary from Public Alpha Test.

Public Beta Test - 3 weeks. All known bugs and features complete. This will mostly be stress testing our game.

Localizations - 3 weeks. More buffer time to finish up and test localizations.

Personnel for DDR:

Executive Producer - Alan Pavlish

Lead/Internal Producer - Rich Vogel

External Producer - Bryan Walker

Admin - Cody Loyd

Director of Programming - Peter Shelus

Lead Programmer, Server - Christopher Mayer

Lead Programmer, Client - TBD

Art Director - TBD

Design Director - Raph Koster

Sr. Designer - TBD

Personnel to add for TDR

Network Engineer - TBD

Server Engineer - TBD

Lead Artist - TBD

Designer - TBD - not needed for TDR but might be needed to keep project moving at optimal pace.

DB Programmer - TBD - not needed for TDR but might be needed to keep project moving at optimal pace.

Full team for project will be determined by the DDR/TDR. Rough estimate at this time for the internal team is 23 plus 5 people at Simis. Again, this is subject to change pending completed DDR and TDR and discussions with Simis.

Other Considerations (0-1 pages):

- The Commander's Intent did not make mention of localization needs. We have proceeded on the assumption that localization into multiple, and a worldwide launch, are required elements of the game, languages based on Marketing's forecasts. We would like clarification from Exec on the specific requirements.
- A-10 issues. With the A10 project coming to an end, many resources are being made available us at this time. The upside is that we have a chance to pick up some talented people and get our project on a fast track. We also will save on recruiting fees and relocation costs, as well as recruiting time. The downside is that we may be bringing people on before we need them, incurring extra expenses basically washing out the money we saved on recruiter fees. While we can most certainly get by with the above personnel, with the size and scope of this project putting on another artist and designer in the TDR stage will help.
- A full Marketing Pitch section is awaiting Marketing's review of the pitch and associated materials. The forecasts supplied have some assumptions in them, particularly the release of an additional upgrade SKU after 12 months. We have not currently made any plans regarding this potential SKU.
- Please find attached a Vision document broken into three sections. The first section covers our overall goals for the design and is fairly high level. The second section is a topline rendition of the design documents we have generated thus far. The third section is a more detailed breakdown of the designs we have in mind to meet the goals described. This should be considered ancillary material supportive of the pitch—read it if you are interested!

On behalf of the Executive Group, I commit to funding a Design Review stage for this project. If the Design Review satisfactorily answers all the questions outlined in the attached template document to the Group's satisfaction, production will continue to the next stage.

Representing the Executive Group:

We commit to providing a Design Review document by the specified date that follows the attached template document and fulfills all the design features listed herein.

Executive Producer:

Budget

Sign

Marketing

Wing Commander/Privateer Online

3 approaches to Positioning:

- To Primary audience: **Live, thrive, and survive in a gritty Wing Commander world.**
(Wing Commander focus, with combat, commerce, colonize feel)
- To Secondary audience: **The first major virtual world that lets you live in space.**
(beating Freelancer to genre ownership)
- To Tertiary audience: **Live in an online sci-fi universe with 100,000s of real people.**
(Real people focus, sci-fi gamers who love Han Solo and Klingons)

Audience:

Primary

- Sci-fi gamers. Ages 18-35. A single 26-year old male who has \$60K HH income. Played the Wing Commander and/or the X-wing series. Own/collect action figures. Enjoys science fiction movies and novels. They aren't as hard-core as flight-sim gamers, but still like some level of complexity in flight models and controls. This group shares many characteristics with action gamers, who like visceral, instant gratification.

Secondary

- PSW RPG fans. Ages 18-35. People that are currently playing one of the PSW's (UO, EQ). This will include all that are released in the next 2 years. These are people that fit the current UO subscriber profile.

Tertiary

Sci-fi fans. Ages 15-45. Have seen all the Star Wars movies more than once and go see all major sci-fi movies at the theater. Watch the Sci-fi channel, the X-files, and Star Trek with regularity. Read science fiction novels. On the extreme end, these are the people attending Star Trek and Star Wars conventions.

Topline marketing timing :

	Aug-99	Sep-99	Oct-99	Nov-99	Dec-99	Jan-00	Feb-00	Mar-00	Apr-00	May-00
Confirm name + position										
Teaser web site live										
Logo/Icon complete										
E3 debut fanfare										
PR covers										
Full web site live										

Launch Marketing Spend (FY02):

US	\$500,000
Europe	\$350,000
Japan	\$100,000
Other	\$50,000
Worldwide	\$1,000,000

Space PSW Competition:

Freelancer

Massively Multiplayer Space Shooter/Trading Game

A Privateer Online competitor by Digital Anvil and MicroSoft. Emphasis on emergent behavior based on complex economic model.

Release of Single Player game in Late 2000, with massively multiplayer add-on '6 months after'.

Allegiance

Massively Multiplayer Strategy/Space Shooter

Exclusively online space shooter/strategy game - seems to emphasize the strategy side. 350 players at a time, 30 possible ships.

Supposedly Winter, 1999 release.

Mankind

Massively Multiplayer 3D Real-time Strategy

Looks like Homeworld online, with a ground warfare. They are boasting 900 million planets, universal chat, vocal chat, day and night cycles, 4 seasons, huge cities and space stations. Retail game comes with one year membership. Shareware version available in the next couple months.

Terminus

Persistent Multiplayer Space Sim

A small Wing Commander Online clone, Terminus' goal is to provide servers that you can set up that can hold dozens of people at a time. It is persistent, and similar to a PO type experience, but nowhere near as large in scale. Terminus is supposedly set to release this fall.

Anarchy Online

Massively Multiplayer Sci-Fi RPG

One of a very rare breed - a sci-fi RPG (no shooter or trading).

Anarchy is very early in development

Budget

Sign

PRIVATEER - IOPLINE

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UNITS		305,000	170,000	475,000	
REVENUE	Net	\$ 9,612,000	\$ 4,144,500	\$ 13,756,500	* Retail is for boxes sold in retail stores that will include a first month free.
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		57%			

VISION

Privateer Online Vision Checklist

Privateer Online

Vision Document

Welcome to the Privateer Online Vision Document. This document is an attempt to define the areas of gameplay that need attention. All too often, we have people on the team knowing why they are designing and implementing each feature. Or why a particular feature is important to be in the game. Or, if it's even necessary. The Vision Checklist is a list of items that we need to address in the game. It starts out as a list, and then becomes a checklist by which to measure the details of our game design and to ensure that we address them.

"Combat, commerce, and colonization, in space."

New Player Goals

A priorities:

- 1 ... must be easily accessible to a mass market audience and a casual player
- 2 ... should have an intuitive user interface
- 3 ... should take no more than 30 seconds to impress the user
- 4 ... should offer a great newbie experience for the first 30 minutes
- 5 ... must satisfy the newbie's desire for an advanced one
- 6 ... must be easy to get into, and make the player feel welcomed into the game and so the game atmosphere is friendly
- 7 ... must offer clear goals to the player
- 8 ... should have a sense of discovery
- 9 ... should have a login sequence that is fast and easy
- 10 ... should have gameplay that can fit a short play session (< 30 minutes)

B priorities:

- 1 ... should not require mapping—the player should never feel lost
- 2 ... should offer a chance to meet someone (such as a mentor) in the first five minutes
- 3 ... must offer a customizable interface so the player can shape their interface to what suits them
- 4 ... will stretch for the mass market

Section One: Vision Checklist

Read this to see the checklist of our goals for this design

Section Two: Vision Topline

Read this to quickly get the gist of our broad goals and how we intend to accomplish them

Section Three: Vision Details

Read this to see preliminary designs for systems to accomplish these goals

A priorities:

- 1 ... must keep backend costs low
- 2 ... should have low support costs
- 3 ... must be a scalable platform so that it remains viable several years after launch
- 4 ... will make use of technology that allows updating the game on the fly after launch
- 5 ... should have easy to use tools for Live support

B priorities:

This document is EA Confidential.

Privateer Online Vision Checklist

"Combat, commerce, and colonization, in space."

Welcome to the Privateer Online Vision Document. This vision document is an attempt to define the areas of gameplay that need attention. All too often games get made without the people on the team knowing why they are designing and implementing each feature. Or why a particular feature is important to be in the game. Or, if it's even necessary. The Vision Checklist is a list of items that we need to address in the game. It starts out as a list, and then becomes a checklist by which to measure the details of our game design and to ensure that we address every issue that is part of a great game.

Newbie issues

A priorities:

- ☐ ... must be easily accessible to a mass market audience and a casual player
 - ☐ ... should have an intuitive user interface
 - ☐ ... should take no more than 30 seconds to impress the user
- ☐ ... should offer a great newbie experience for the first 30 minutes
 - ☐ ... must satisfy the newbie in the first 5 minutes
 - ☐ ... must be easy to get into, as a new player and as an advanced one
 - ☐ ... must offer a strong support system so that players feel welcomed into the game and so the game atmosphere is friendly
 - ☐ ... must offer clear goals to newbies
- ☐ ... should have a sense of discovery
- ☐ ... should have a login sequence that is fast and easy
- ☐ ... should have gameplay that can fit a short play session (< 30 minutes)

B priorities:

- ☐ ... should not require mapping—the player should never feel lost
- ☐ ... should offer a chance to meet someone (such as a greeter) in the first five minutes
- ☐ ... must offer a customizable play environment so that players can shape their interface to what suits them
- ☐ ... will stretch for the mass market

Live service issues

A priorities:

- ☐ ... must have a high retention rate for subscribers
 - ☐ ... must keep backend costs low
 - ☐ ... should have low support costs
- ☐ ... must be a scalable platform so that it remains viable several years after launch
 - ☐ ... will make use of technology that allows updating the game on the fly after launch
 - ☐ ... should have easy to use tools for Live support

B priorities:

- ☐ ... should empower players to take action against those who are obnoxious
- ☐ ... should keep a small database size
- ☐ ... should have a low target bandwidth
- ☐ ... must minimize human administrative intervention

Technology issues

A priorities:

- ☐ ... must be playable via the Web in some fashion
- ☐ ... must permit means of "playing" while offline
- ☐ ... should be fully localized for a worldwide launch
- ☐ ... should scale up to look good on the machines customers will be using 2 years after the ship date

B priorities:

- ☐ ... will have a scaleable server architecture
- ☐ ... will make use of an interface description language
- ☐ ... will have a highly scaleable graphics engine
- ☐ ... will offer a high degree of easy customization for player characters and ships
- ☐ ... will be easily extensible by the Live team
- ☐ ... should support as low end a machine as possible, to maximize the audience

Retention issues

A priorities:

- ☐ ... should expose new strategies throughout the game to the player
 - ☐ ... should provide multiple ladders of advancement so that players discover entirely new game mechanics, new ways to play the game, as they advance
 - ☐ ... will have a technology tree that unfolds over time
 - ☐ ... should permit players to switch professions without starting the character over
- ☐ ... should blur real life and the online character
- ☐ ... will make use of "rock-paper-scissors" relationships so that no one specialty, item, or skill is paramount
- ☐ ... will offer tools for player-driven content
- ☐ ... will offer motives and rewards for short session play
- ☐ ... will provide privileges to experienced players

B priorities:

- ☐ ... should encourage specialization
- ☐ ... will make use of world-class storytelling talent
- ☐ ... should have a world that feels alive
- ☐ ... should make players work to remain at their current level of achievement in the game

Gameplay issues

A priorities:

- ☐ ... must support many different styles of play
 - ☐ ... will satisfy Achiever-oriented players
 - ☐ ... will satisfy Socializer-oriented players
 - ☐ ... will satisfy Explorer-oriented players

- ☐ ... will satisfy Killer-oriented players
- ☐ ... should have big visual payoffs
- ☐ ... should support character building and advancement
- ☐ ... should have little touches that add depth
- ☐ ... should make the player feel smart
- ☐ ... should make use of humor and personality
- ☐ ... should never make the player feel ripped off by the game mechanics
- ☐ ... should have secrets and lore to it
- ☐ ... will offer players lots of rewards

B priorities:

- ☐ ... should offer a meaningful story and memorable characters
- ☐ ... should provide a sense of exploration
- ☐ ... should have defining moments that are easily remembered
- ☐ ... will offer great cultures to experience

Social interaction

A priorities:

- ☐ ... must encourage and support a community
- ☐ ... must give tools to players to shape their own experiences
- ☐ ... should encourage a sense of player ownership in the game world
- ☐ ... should have ladders and leader boards for everything in the game, including social activities
- ☐ ... will support a wide range of in-game communications systems
- ☐ ... will offer robust support for players to form guilds and organizations
- ☐ ... will try to fulfill all of Amy Jo Kim's principles of community building

Production goals

A priorities:

- ☐ ... the game will have a high level of coding standards
- ☐ ... the code will be architected and designed to be reusable
- ☐ ... the game will undergo a thorough public beta test
- ☐ ... the game's design and code will be extensively documented

Privateer Online Vision Topline

This document is intended to serve as a master plan for the "vision" of the product, to keep us on track throughout the development process, and to serve as a check and balance as features are discussed.

The document has been divided into a few topline goals, and then those goals have been broken down into feature lists intended to support the goals. The key goals are:

1. The game must be easily **accessible** to a mass market audience and a casual player.
2. The game must have a high **retention** rate for subscribers.
3. The game must keep **backend costs low**.
4. The game must be a **scaleable** platform, so that it remains viable several years after launch.
5. The game must appeal to a **broad audience** and support many different styles of play.
6. The game must encourage and support a **community**.

It is my hope that as we continue to refine this document throughout the initial design process, these goals (and the sub-goals contained within each) help us shape the design to what we actually intend as end results, rather than based merely on "what's cool." Input on this document is therefore very much welcome.

As a general philosophy, *Privateer Online* is, like *Ultima Online*, about creating a world for players to exist in; about creating a universe that they can shape. It is not about providing a linear narrative experience, but about giving tools to players to shape their own experiences. It is not about creating just a game for brief entertainment, but about providing an online space wherein meaningful experiences with real emotions can take place. Ultimately, these things lead to the greatest customer loyalty and the greatest possible depth in the experience.

Low Backend Costs

Retention must be weighed against the cost of operating the service. To maximize profits, we must design the game in such a manner that it does not cost too much to run. There are many lessons we have learned from *Ultima Online* on this front, which we intend to take advantage of.

1. Although we are still going to attempt a truly persistent world, we will employ every tactic we can to reduce database size. This will increase the rate of backups, reduce storage cost, and improve the responsiveness of the servers.
2. We will have a low target bandwidth. Bandwidth costs are one of the most significant costs to running this type of game.
3. The game will be designed to minimize human administrative intervention. The human cost to running a game like this can easily get out of hand.
4. We will attempt to make much of the game playable via the Web so that we do not incur the cost of ongoing connections to the game servers.

Accessibility

Privateer Online must be very easy to get into, comfortable to play, easy to get quickly in and out of, and offer strong support systems to players. The key elements that are required for this are:

1. The game must be **easy to get into**, as a new player and as an advanced one, to open up the more casual market.
2. The game must offer a **customizable play environment** so that players can shape their interface to what suits them.
3. We must offer a **strong support system** so that players feel welcomed into the game, and so that the game's atmosphere is friendly.

Retention

The key to success in the online arena is retention of subscribers. There is an acquisition cost for every player who joins the service, so we must endeavor to get the maximum amount of subscriber dollars out of them as is possible. The lifetime of a player in the service is directly related to the game design. The principal approaches we are taking to encourage player retention are:

1. The provision of **multiple ladders of advancement** so that players discover entirely new game mechanics, new ways to play the game, as they advance. Some of these ladders are truly different, and change the game from a combat one to a roleplaying one to a strategy one to an economic sim.
2. Every effort will be made to encourage a **sense of player ownership** in the game world. Players who have a stake in the game that they cannot migrate to a competing product are less likely to leave.
3. An **evolving narrative** and sense of change the game world will make the universe seem dynamic and thereby capture player interest over a long span of time, whereas a static world will pall.

Low Backend Costs

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3. The game will be designed to **minimize human administrative intervention**. The human cost to running a game like this can easily get out of hand.
4. We will attempt to make much of the game **playable via the Web** so that we do not incur the cost of ongoing connections to the game servers.

5. We will provide facilities within the game to ensure that you can advance in the game via **offline play**. Key processes required for advancement will proceed regardless of whether or not the player is logged on, thus leading to reduced bandwidth costs.

Scaleable platform

Privateer Online will, if successful, be played for many years to come. We must provide tools within the game to permit ongoing expansion with great ease, to allow the game to scale up and down as the subscriber base and profit margins demand, and to make the game appealing when it is found on the shelf two years after its initial ship.

1. The game will make use of an embedded **script language** to allow “on the fly” addition of game features without the need to recompile the servers.
2. The game’s **server architecture** will be scaleable, allowing us to run on as many or as few machines as we need to in order to support the playerbase.
3. The game will rely on a server-side **interface description language** so that new interfaces to features can be designed and implemented without requiring client updates, which cause bandwidth spikes and difficulties in patching.
4. The game will make use of a **highly scaleable graphics engine** that is not only top-notch today, but which will scale up to support the visuals players will expect two years after launch.

Broad Audience

In order to reach the widest possible audience, *Privateer Online* must support many different styles of play. Fortunately, there is well-regarded research out there as to what sorts of things player enjoy doing in online settings. The game will therefore try hard to obtain the correct balance of Richard Bartle’s four player types:

1. The game will offer a deep system for developing characters, with many different ways to measure your ability against the game’s implicit ladders of success. This will satisfy the **Achievers**, who measure themselves against goals set up by the game. They will also be able to display their achievements to others easily.
2. The **Socializers** are interested in human interaction, and for them the game will support robust communications systems, socially oriented and peaceful professions, a high degree of avatar personalization, and the ability to formalize the communities they build within the game.
3. There is a type of player who lives just for discovering the many things the game has to offer—not to beat the game, but just to learn everything possible about it. These **Explorers** will be interested in the terrain generation system, mission generation engine, and the wide array of professions.
4. Player vs player combat and conflict is key to a lively, interesting society. The **Killers** are those who seek to exercise power over others in an online setting. Balancing their depredations against the need of peaceful players to play in peace is a key design element in *PO*. The use of PvP planets and space areas, along with a range of tactics and devices for PvP combat, will make this type of player happy without tilting the game too much in their favor.

Community

Ultimately, the goal of any online game is to create a thriving community around itself. Both inside and outside the game, it must be easy for players of common interests to band together, form groups with some degree of identity and persistence, and form communities.

1. The game will support a wide range of **communications channels** to encourage player interaction.
2. The game will offer robust support for players to form **companies and guilds** of many types.
3. The game will endeavor to fulfill all of Dr. Amy Jo Kim's **principles for community building** on the Internet.

1. The game must be easy to get into, comfortable to play, easy to get quickly in and out of, and offer strong support systems to players. The key elements required for this are:
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Player Experience

Players must be very easy to get into, comfortable to play, easy to get quickly in and out of, and offer strong support systems to players. The key elements required for this are:

4. The game must be easy to get into, comfortable to play, easy to get quickly in and out of, and offer strong support systems to players. The key elements required for this are:
5. The game must offer a customizable interface so that players can shape their interface to suit their needs.
6. We must offer a strong support system so that players feel welcomed into the game, and so that the game's atmosphere is friendly.

Ease of entry

The battle for a player's subscription money is largely won and lost in the first few minutes of play. Has the player made a friend? Do they feel welcome, or overwhelmed? Do they have enough guidance as to what to do first? Even after becoming an advanced player, they should feel like it is easy to drop in and visit friends, or have a quick adventure of whatever sort, without major hassle.

Hardware

- The game should be playable on a laptop.
- The game should support as low end a machine as possible to maximize the potential customer base.
- The game should scale up to make use of the latest technology to maximum effect.

First game session

The first game session must ease the new player into the game and give them basic instruction on the game mechanics, so that they feel comfortable.

Taking the newbie

Privateer Online Vision Details

This section of the document is intended to supply the details for the goals described in the topline. It will therefore recapitulate those goals, but flesh out the design directions are pursuing.

As described in the topline, the key goals are:

1. The game must be easily **accessible** to a mass market audience and a casual player.
2. The game must have a high **retention** rate for subscribers.
3. The game must keep **backend costs low**.
4. The game must be a **scaleable** platform, so that it remains viable several years after launch.
5. The game must appeal to a **broad audience** and support many different styles of play.
6. The game must encourage and support a **community**.

Accessibility

Privateer Online must be very easy to get into, comfortable to play, easy to get quickly in and out of, and offer strong support systems to players. The key elements that are required for this are:

4. The game must be **easy to get into**, as a new player and as an advanced one, to open up the more casual market.
5. The game must offer a **customizable play environment** so that players can shape their interface to what suits them.
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- The game should scale up to make use of the latest technology to maximum effect.

First game session

The first game session must ease the new player into the game and give them basic instruction on the game mechanics, so that they feel comfortable.

♦ Training the newbie

Some form of training within the game context (eg, newbie quests) must exist to assist the newbie in finding a purpose and a direction in the game.

♦ *Narrow range of initial choices*

The initial character building and gameplay options visible to the new player must be sharply limited in order to avoid confusing them. Over time, the game should unfold as they advance, with new options coming into play.

♦ *Newbie greeters*

The game should make use of a program similar to the UO Companion program, so that newbies are greeted by a volunteer player as they enter the game.

♦ *Configurable identity*

The sense of personal identity in *PO* must be strong, and competitive with all other online products.

Visuals

The avatar for your character must be visually customizable to a high degree:

Race

Possibly, we can offer alien races for play.

Body shape

Endomorphic and ectomorphic body types, differing facial bone structures, along with some degree of mesh deformation and scaling, should be available. A facemaker, for creating custom faces a la *Mr Potato Head* should exist as well.

Hair and skin

A full range of hairstyles, hair colors, and skin tones should be available.

Clothing

A complete range of clothing of various types, from the functional to the ethnically distinctive to the merely ceremonial, must be present in the game.

Profile and names

Players should be able to generate custom profiles about their character, with sections reserved for game flagging (a character history based on events), for personal writing of their own background, and for company/guild data.

Each player should have a unique name, but the unique name should be composed of multiple parts, each of which may have overlaps with other players (eg, there might be many Joes, and quite a few Joe Smiths, but only one Joe Smith of Mars). This allows players to get the name that they may be attached to from other games, but still gives us all the benefits of unique names.

♦ *Integrated with the web*

The game should be tightly integrated with the web, so that the experience is as seamless as possible. The interface from website to game should be as consistent as possible, and the website should offer full array of advice and help, comparable in scope to what is offered on the UO Stratics website (<http://uo.stratics.com>).

Later game sessions

As players progress through the game, it should increase in complexity and in flexibility. But at the same time, the ease of entry must be maintained. The login sequence should be designed to maximize the speed of login, and the gameplay tailored to fit a short play session if that is what is desired.

♦ *Mission board*

All major cities and centers of population should feature mission boards which can sort missions by various criteria. Players should be able to walk to up to mission boards and quickly and easily find events and missions exactly suitable to their capabilities. Players should also be able to add missions to the mission board themselves (such as requests for delivery of resources, etc).

♦ *Spawning of specialized areas*

The game should offer planets and space areas suited to different play styles, to allow quick and easy entry into the facet of the game that is the player's personal preference. For example, special planets should be spawned for shoot 'em up ground missions, for rescue missions, gathering of alien artifacts, etc. Space sections for asteroid showers, pirate hunts, derelict ship retrieval, etc.

♦ *Cloning system*

Death shall have a sting, but players can buy insurance against it. By allowing players to clone their character, we save a snapshot of their capabilities at a given time, essentially giving them a backup to return to. This process costs money, however, and therefore helps drain credits out of the economy. It is always possible to revert to a clone of yourself as a newbie.

Customizable play environment

Players will be *living* in the *PO* universe. Therefore, they must be able to make it as comfortable as possible for extended sessions of play. This requires the client to provide a huge array of customization options to players so that they can configure every aspect of the client.

Macro system

A full-fledged macro system must permit remapping of the entire keyboard, creating keyboard shortcuts to major interface elements, creating macros for spoken text and all commands, and so on.

Localization and international support

PO will be a global game, supporting a global audience. The game must be designed from the outset to support users from many nations.

♦ *Unicode*

PO will support Unicode text input and output, and as much text as possible will be in external files for easy localization.

◆ *SYSTRAN*

We will make use of the SYSTRAN technology for on-the-fly translations. Text that is automatically translated will appear in italic, with the name of the original language prefaced. Text that the players lack the translation pair for should appear in italic in the original language, with the name of the language prefaced. Players will be able to disable the translator if they so choose.

Filtering systems

A major part of the game will consist of social interaction between players. The problem of shaping and channeling this communication is fairly significant.

◆ *Text output filtering*

Players should be able to choose what sorts of text they wish to receive. If they don't want to hear broadcast channels, see the news ticker, or wish to simply close their ears and not hear speech in the same room, then these should all be options.

◆ *Language filtering*

Players should be able to define strings that they wish to be filtered out and replaced with punctuation (cartoon swearing) via an obscenity filter.

◆ *Ignore facilities*

A remappable hotkey must exist so that players can block out text from specific players should they choose not to hear from them. This interface must be quick and painless to use.

Strong support system

We must, from the outset, target several key goals:

1. A friendly, welcoming atmosphere to the game.
2. Low support costs.
3. Empowerment of players to take action against those who are obnoxious.
4. A strict policy and Terms of Service, and enforcement thereof.

GM system

We shall make use of an elaborated version of the Gm support tools developed for *UO*, working in conjunction with the Live group and the Player Relations group to determine the best method of handling things.

◆ *Paging*

The game will support in-game support personnel in a manner similar to *UO*'s Game Masters.

Enhanced GM support tools

We will work with the relevant people to ensure that the tools provided fit the needs of their departments.

Editor client

The capabilities in this client are designed for development team use only. After we are done developing the game, use of this client will be restricted to the Live group in charge of the service.

GM client

A specialized client with specific abilities tailored for the answering of in-game pages will be available for use by the Game Masters and Player Relations staff. This client will have a subset of the tools that the editor client does, but will also include full support for in-game paging of admins (queues, etc).

Volunteer client

The volunteer client will be a specialized version of the standard release client intended for use by offsite volunteer administrative staff, the equivalent of UO's Counselors. This client will make use of IP, character, and account verification for all special capabilities.

Standard pages via GMS

PO will support the standard methods for interfacing to the Player Relations help desk software for GM paging (using OWO Mail and the standard procedures in place for UO and UO2).

Harassment logging

PO will make use of a circular buffer that tracks the last 2k of text witnessed or spoken by each character in the game. When harassment is reported, this 2k log will be automatically mailed to the help desk along with the page for assistance.

◆ *Email support*

As with UO, there will exist email support channels for various topics.

In-game messaging to preset addresses

The in-game messaging system (OWO Mail) will support default address book entries for major addresses (technical support, game support, etc).

External messaging

The addresses for these key locations will also be available via the website.

◆ *Telephone support*

PO will offer the same level of telephone support as is available for other ORIGIN online games at the time.

OWO

As befits a vibrant online community, PO will offer a support website designed by the Online Community group that fits the theme of the game and falls under the OWO umbrella.

◆ *Update news*

A section maintained by the development team will launch during the development cycle to build a relationship with potential customers and beta testers. Post-launch, this section of the site will evolve into an Update Center devoted to the latest updates to the game, and into a comprehensive statistics and hints site.

◆ *Community news*

From the outset, every effort will be made to involve the community, using measures such as spotlighting fan websites that launch before the game is available for testing, incorporating community elements into the game fiction, and so on (contests to get specific elements into the game, etc). The website will serve as a means of spotlighting these community contributions.

◆ *Discussion areas*

We anticipate much lively discussion around the game, and therefore the website should also have a full-fledged discussion environment that is active well before the game's launch into beta testing.

Retention

The key to success in the online arena is retention of subscribers. There is an acquisition cost for every player who joins the service, so we must endeavor to get the maximum amount of subscriber dollars out of them as is possible. The lifetime of a player in the service is directly related to the game design. The principal approaches we are taking to encourage player retention are:

4. The provision of **multiple ladders of advancement** so that players discover entirely new game mechanics, new ways to play the game, as they advance. Some of these ladders are truly different, and change the game from a combat one to a roleplaying one to a strategy one to an economic sim.
5. Every effort will be made to encourage a **sense of player ownership** in the game world. Players who have a stake in the game that they cannot migrate to a competing product are less likely to leave.
6. An **evolving narrative** and sense of change the game world will make the universe seem dynamic and thereby capture player interest over a long span of time, whereas a static world will pall.

Multiple ladders of advancement

The game should reveal itself to the user over time, with many different playstyles supported from the outset. It should be possible to have measurable advancement in the game on a variety of ladders, ranging from the action-oriented to the strategic to the social.

Space combat

Space combat will be one of the main drivers of interest in the game. In the long run, space combat will be the arena in which conflicts generated in other parts of the game plays out, as well as a

source of adventure and easy multiplayer activity. In addition, it will be one of the chief avenues for casual players to get into the game, allowing rapid entry and exit and short but satisfying game sessions.

◆ *Modular ship design*

The "ship-as-avatar" concept will allow a high degree of customization in the vessels. Players will be able to choose what sorts of looks, colors, textures, and other personalization details they wish in their ship chassis. Large-scale capital ships will also exist, which may even permit free movement aboard ship.

◆ *Range of propulsion mechanisms*

Different propulsion mechanisms will offer not just different advantages in different arenas, but will also literally involve new ways of steering the ships. Among the types we propose are solar sails (which are steered by adjusting the solar wind panels), standard propulsion systems, and multiple jet systems that require a higher degree of coordination. You will be able to attach differing sorts of engines with differing kinds of benefits and drawbacks to several different types of chassis.

◆ *Multiple professions on board ship*

In capital ships, cooperation between multiple players will be emphasized. Multiple stations within the vessel will allow play via differing interfaces (gunner, pilot, tactician, commander, or engineer).

◆ *Range of weaponry and defenses*

Customizable ships will extend beyond propulsion and visuals and into the realm of weaponry, defenses, and specialized modules. Players will be able to manufacture, trade in, install, and use these modules, and also destroy them on opposing targets.

Character building

The primary interface to the game for players will be their particular character, not their ship (the ship is assumed to enclose their character, and a single character might well own a fleet of ships). Players will develop their characters over time in an RPG style, by purchasing training and cybernetic upgrades to their bodies. These attributes will affect the machinery they will be able to use (be it planetside mining installations or ship-based piloting systems) and how well they can use it.

◆ *Array of statistics*

A character shall be defined by a collection of core statistics, some of which can change and some of which cannot, some of which are visible to the player and some of which are not.

Visible stats

These are attributes that the player can configure when creating the character, and which the player can watch to see their advancement in the game. During character creation, players can choose to create characters at a high or low level of detail, or merely use template character types.

Permanent stats

Some statistics may be of a sort that cannot be changed, such as planet of origin, character race, etc.

Dynamic stats

Most attributes will be of a sort that can change during the course of gameplay, based on training the player receives or other forms of advancement.

Invisible stats

The game shall make use of a system similar to *UO*'s "objvars," for dynamically extending the character structure. These variables can be set by game events or tracked by game systems.

Permanent stats

Flags for completion of particular missions, particular sorts of character deeds or behaviors, etc, can be tracked by this sort of data. Examples might include a player who commits some heinous act of piracy, like destroying a medical ship—forever after this character will carry this on their character record and it can affect how the game responds to his actions.

Dynamic stats

Reputation values of various kinds are probably the chief type of hidden dynamic stat. Tracking things like how many bugaboos a given mercenary has killed over how many deaths he has had to them gives us a way to rank the most successful mercenaries in the game.

Professional rankings

Every character is able to pick up multiple professions, depending on how much money they have to pay the ongoing fees associated with being a profession. Every profession has multiple level. Lower levels are free to join, and grant access to basic equipment. But higher levels of professions require you to pay dues to the governing organization behind that profession—and also grant access to nicer and fancier equipment. Every profession is therefore a ladder of achievement.

♦ *Array of professions*

The full array of professions should cover resource mining of various types, combat skills, cultural/social activities, piloting, and miscellaneous skills (mapping, for example). What follows is a cursory list of some potential professions.

Energy collection:

Space

Solar energy

Fuel

Ground

Hydro

Solar

Radiation

Food/agribusiness

Hunting

Farming

Social

News reportage and
commentary

Funplex operation

Writer

Musician

Combat

Mercenary or Bounty	Implants
Hunter	Weapons
Pilot	Armor
Shock troop	Objects
Demolitions	Merchant
Military	Ferrying goods
Tactician	Marketplaces
Pilot	Stock market
Gunnery	Commodities market
Pirate	Shops
Technical	Resource mining
Engineer	Space
Civilian	Scoop systems
Installations	Laser mining
Cloning	Ground
Furniture	Installations
Ship systems	Animal products and hunting
Cybernetics	

Ability to switch professions without restarting the character

This is a key way to maximize player retention. Players are reluctant to abandon a character they have worked hard to establish. Allowing players to shift the nature of their character so that they can start over without actually starting over allows them to retain all the emotional investment they had in the character.

◆ *Certification in professions*

Certification for levels of professions are literally just purchased with money. This makes it easy for players to give a newbie a leg up to a certain point. Specific pieces of equipment and specific abilities related to the equipment are accessible only if you have a given certification level. For example, a gunner who only has level 4 certification is not allowed to use the neural link to the guns that improves firing rate, because the circuitry will not recognize him as an individual who is qualified—even if he used to be qualified in the past.

◆ *Paying to remain current*

Past a certain level of certification, players must pay ongoing fees to remain certified. This means that picking up abilities at a high level demands that the player be making use of these abilities to generate cash. It also means that “twinking” a newbie up to high levels will not result in a permanent boost to the newbie unless the newbie is able to operate at a high play level and actually turn a profit with the certifications he purchases.

◆ *Money as the measure*

Everything in *Privateer Online* is measured around money and valuation. In the case of professions, access to the higher levels is directly dependent on just having the cash for it. But since every profession is expected to have its intricacies, merely buying your way into the highest level of a profession does not mean you will be ranked highly on the leader boards. Nor does it mean that you will be able to turn a profit with all the shiny

toys you bought. Instead, it means that you have bought your way a spot on a pro sports team even though you may only be good enough for the local sandlot.

- ◆ *Leader boards by profession*

We will strive to find ways to measure all professions against one another so that we can rank individual professions. For example, musicians can be ranked by how popular their in-game CDs are. Mercenaries by how many kills of bugaboos they make and how frequently they die. Explorers by how many new places they have discovered. The possibilities are endless, and allow there to exist Top Ten lists for virtually every aspect of the game.

Stock market

The stock market allows players to actually invest in one another, and provides an interesting new dynamic to guilds in online games. Playing the stock market is likely to be a game in itself that can be played alongside *PO*, and will therefore be an achievement ladder of its own. We will track the people who have made the most profits on stock transactions, and use this to generate a Top Ten ladder also.

Economic markets

Mining resource, and trading goods from planet to planet is at the heart of *Privateer*. Specific planets will have commodities markets, and you will be able to become a successful wheeler and dealer in these marketplaces, thus finding a whole new economic subgame.

Mini-games

As in UO, embedded mini-games will be around to allow players to amuse themselves. We will attempt to track data surrounding wins and losses with this as well (it would be wonderful, for example, to actually be able to earn real chess ratings via playing chess in *PO*).

- ◆ *Board games*

Chess, Checkers, and Backgammon.

- ◆ *Gambling*

Roulette, blackjack, and decks of cards that can be used for other games if players wish.

Sense of player ownership

A sense of player ownership in the world is the key tactic for retention. Letting players establish beachheads in the game that they simply cannot take to other games makes them very reluctant to leave.

Player housing and cities

Players will be able to build houses and in the aggregate, cities. When buildings near each other reach a certain density, cities can be formalized, which turns the area into a safe zone, but also requires ongoing expenditures for the "safe zone field generator." One player can be elected as the governor, with some special powers over the state of the city (such as parameters of the safe area, defining the boundaries of the safe area, etc).

Ship-as-avatar

Your ships in *PO* will also be a major piece of real estate that you cannot take with you. By allowing people to highly customize their ships, we will achieve a strong sense of ownership.

Guilds

Guilds often do migrate from game to game. But *PO* will be unique in that it will be the only online game with such a strong method of ranking guilds against one another. It will be very difficult for guilds to give up their standing in *PO* once they become established.

Evolving narrative

A sense of events going on, of history, of narratives unfolding, is key to any online game. *PO* will work hard to provide this by supplying the following:

1. A shadowy nemesis alien race with ulterior motives that are dimly understood.
2. Traitors everyone loves to hate, who conspire with this race for personal gain.
3. A method of ongoing story delivery, perhaps via a "stage description language" for delivering in-game-engine cutscenes on a regular basis to players, to advance the soap opera plot.
4. The ability for players to record and widely disseminate history within the game, in the form of in-game books.
5. A player profession dedicated specifically to recording and distributing news and events within the game.

Low Backend Costs

Retention must be weighed against the cost of operating the service. To maximize profits, we must design the game in such a manner that it does not cost too much to run. There are many lessons we have learned from *Ultima Online* on this front, which we intend to take advantage of.

1. Although we are still going to attempt a truly persistent world, we will employ every tactic we can to **reduce database size**. This will increase the rate of backups, reduce storage cost, and improve the responsiveness of the servers.
2. We will have a **low target bandwidth**. Bandwidth costs are one of the most significant costs to running this type of game.
3. The game will be designed to **minimize human administrative intervention**. The human cost to running a game like this can easily get out of hand.
4. We will attempt to make much of the game **playable via the Web** so that we do not incur the cost of ongoing connections to the game servers.
5. We will provide facilities within the game to ensure that you can advance in the game via **offline play**. Key processes required for advancement will proceed regardless of whether or not the player is logged on, thus leading to reduced bandwidth costs.

Reduced database size

PO will be a true persistent world, which automatically implies large database sizes. However, we will be working hard to ensure that the database sizes are not prohibitive.

Planet generation engine

We will not be building or storing maps in the game. Instead, we will be generating maps based on a fixed random seed, using matching algorithms on client and server. This will allow us to cut our map building time dramatically shorter, plus will give us the capacity for a far larger map than any heretofore seen in any game.

Multiobject structure

All structures in the game will be built using a multiobject structure, whereby an entire building is considered to be one single object. This should have a large impact on the backup size.

No equipment or inventory

We will be avoiding the concepts of "inventory" and "equipment" as much as possible. Currency, raw materials, and the like will not be objects, but merely values moved between one container or repository and another. Decorations for houses will be objects, but they will only be installable in houses themselves. Equipment will be done via flags, largely, and the typical items collected by players will not exist. The lack of miscellaneous objects to carry and wear means that we should have a much smaller backup size for player data than *UO* does.

Data-driven system

We will be making use of an SQL database for everything related to *PO*, which should make backups more efficient, restore times faster, data size smaller, and access speeds better.

Low target bandwidth

We will have a low target bandwidth, as specified by the Online Group. By necessity because of the nature of a 3d engine, we will need a higher bandwidth than a 2d game.

Engine interference with systems

One of the measures we will consider to prevent overly high density of dynamic objects in a given location is to have different types of engines or too many comunits in one place cause interference with one another, to encourage players to spread out. So a space combat with too many ships will cause engine malfunctions, forcing players to fight in smaller battles.

Minimize human admin intervention

Human costs are the highest in running online games. The ideal online game would require zero administrative intervention on the part of the company running it.

Player-driven systems

To this end, as many systems as possible will be designed around player-driven dynamics, rather than hardcoded values or processes that will oblige administrative intervention for balancing at a later date when the game is mature. In addition, as many systems as possible will be turned over to player hands, to reduce admin overhead. Examples are:

- ◆ *Harassment and misbehavior*

Players will be able to censor out harassers, and will be able to automatically send harassment logs, without the need for an admin present at the time of the incident.

♦ *Community support*

Guilds and companies will not require administrative approval to be created, and will instead be entirely player-driven.

Self-balancing systems

We will strive to design the AI systems of the game in such a manner that they rely on statistical evaluation of the game's current state, rather than on hardcoded values (eg, item prices in a database). A key example is:

♦ *Economy*

Prices in the game will be set by using the average last sale prices from player-run vendors, rather than an arbitrary fixed value, so that supply and demand will have free play to determine market price.

Play via the web

Play via the Web offers a much lower bandwidth cost than a continuous connection via the game. We shall work to make the greatest possible use of the Web as a play interface to the game.

Stock market and commodities market

It should be possible to see the actions of the stock and commodities markets, as well as actually place stock buy and sell orders via the web site.

Web-based leader boards

All the leader boards for various professions should be visible via the web site.

Notification of events

It should be possible to monitor the news ticker or other major news events within the game via the web site.

Offline play

Continuous connections cost us more in bandwidth. Therefore, being able to advance in the game system via automated means that do not require the player to be online maximizes our profit margin.

Automated resource mining

Unlike *Ultima Online* where you are required to be present doing work in order to mine resources, *Privateer Online* will allow you to set up a robotic mining installation that mines for you. It will have ongoing energy costs, and a maximum capacity, so you will need to check in on it, but it will simply check time elapsed and retroactively fill in some random events that occurred, so there is no ongoing process.

Commodities market

Your goods can be placed on the commodities market for sale at a later date, even while you are offline, with your bank account being credited by the appropriate amount.

Player-run shops

Players will be able to run shops in a manner similar to *UO*, by setting up robotic vendor machines that handle the task of transactions for you, while you are offline.

Scaleable platform

Privateer Online will, if successful, be played for many years to come. We must provide tools within the game to permit ongoing expansion with great ease, to allow the game to scale up and down as the subscriber base and profit margins demand, and to make the game appealing when it is found on the shelf two years after its initial ship.

1. The game will make use of an embedded **script language** to allow "on the fly" addition of game features without the need to recompile the servers.
2. The game's **server architecture** will be scaleable, allowing us to run on as many or as few machines as we need to in order to support the player base.
3. The game will rely on a server-side **interface description language** so that new interfaces to features can be designed and implemented without requiring client updates, which cause bandwidth spikes and difficulties in patching.
4. The game will make use of a **highly scaleable graphics engine** that is not only top-notch today, but which will scale up to support the visuals players will expect two years after launch.

Script language

The embedded scripting language will be used to create all of the usable items in the game, as well as to develop interface systems and game systems.

Event-driven

The script language must be fully event-driven, with events causing trigger responses.

On the fly alteration

It must be possible to alter scripts and get them into the running game without bringing down the servers.

Server architecture

The server should be scaleable in such a manner that it can be run on a varying amount of machines, depending on player load and database size. Likewise, it should be able to scale up so that as we add users, we can increment the hardware, memory, or storage space required.

Server process spawning

The architecture envisioned for handling the multiple planets involves running them as processes only when there are actual players logged onto the individual planet. When players depart, the central game server intelligently backs up and then brings down the planet. When players arrive, it brings it back up. This system of removing idle areas from the galaxy should significantly reduce our CPU load.

Interface description language

In order to avoid large downloads during the live service when new interfaces or features are added, all interface components in the game will be assembled from individual extant graphic parts that fit together via an interface description language. The encoded interface can then be scripted, and the interface added on the fly with only a server update.

Highly scalable graphics engine

As an overall goal, the graphics engine should be highly flexible. We need to handle ground, space, a multiplicity of camera angles, and we need to ensure that the game looks great on systems that don't even exist yet.

Target ground requirements

Our tentative requirements for the ground include:

- Ability to get 50+ figures on screen at once, at a very low level of detail (playing card figures, if need be) without slowing down
- Algorithmic terrain generation
- Non-static environment and the ability to add structures to the map on the fly
- Very flexible camera, with at the minimum support for 1st person, chase-cam, and 3rd person isometric
- Ability to use pieces-parts clothing on figures, preferably with layering
- Hueing textures (ability to apply color ranges to specific portions of textures, or the texture in its entirety)

Target space requirements

- Ability to get many ships on screen at once, at a very low level of detail, without slowing down
- Algorithmic generation of space volumes with features such as asteroids, gas clouds, etc
- Flexible camera that supports all the standard views
- Modular ships with articulating parts
- Partial-hueing of textures and decals on ships

Broad Audience

In order to reach the widest possible audience, *Privateer Online* must support many different styles of play. Fortunately, there is well-regarded research out there as to what sorts of things player enjoy doing in online settings. The game will therefore try hard to obtain the correct balance of Richard Bartle's four player types:

1. The game will offer a deep system for developing characters, with many different ways to measure your ability against the game's implicit ladders of success. This will satisfy the **Achievers**, who measure themselves against goals set up by the game. They will also be able to display their achievements to others easily.
2. The **Socializers** are interested in human interaction, and for them the game will support robust communications systems, socially oriented and peaceful professions, a high degree of avatar personalization, and the ability to formalize the communities they build within the game.

3. There is a type of player who lives just for discovering the many things the game has to offer—not to beat the game, but just to learn everything possible about it. These **Explorers** will be interested in the terrain generation system, mission generation engine, and the wide array of professions.
4. Player vs player combat and conflict is key to a lively, interesting society. The **Killers** are those who seek to exercise power over others in an online setting. Balancing their depredations against the need of peaceful players to play in peace is a key design element in *PO*. The use of PvP planets and space areas, along with a range of tactics and devices for PvP combat, will make this type of player happy without tilting the game too much in their favor.

Achievers

The Achiever is interested in progressing along a ladder of advancement set up by the game mechanics. To provide the best possible game experience for this player, we must provide multiple ways of playing the game that offer sufficient depth.

Multiple ladders of achievement

Privateer Online shall be capable of being played as a space sim, as a combat-oriented RPG, as a roleplaying environment, as an economic strategy game, and as a chat space.

◆ *Combat*

A substantial amount of our audience will be drawn by the prospect of combat, as it is what they are most familiar with, and it will be the easiest part of the game to understand. *Privateer Online* will offer combat both in space and on the ground. There will be two principal types of opponents for combat: other players, and computer controlled enemies. The principal source of computer-controlled enemies will be the nemesis alien race (humorously referred to as “the bugaboos” for now).

Space

Space combat will be done using player-owned ships that are modular in design, so that different players can own different styles of vessels. In addition, capability in piloting will depend not only on the player’s literal skill, but also on the attributes involved in the character that is piloting (eg, an untrained character may have rougher responsiveness at the controls than a trained one).

Ground

Ground combat will be largely missile and laser based, although there will be opponents that must be fought with hand-to-hand means because of immunities of various sorts.

◆ *Crafting*

There will be an extensive array of items that players can manufacture, including numerous types of weapons, armors, ship add-ons, house add-ons, and personal character upgrades (cyborg implants). Reaching higher certification ladders is required to be able to craft the more advanced items, creating another advancement ladder for players.

◆ *Resource mining*

Raw resources are required for crafting of all sorts, as well as being required for fuel for many types of buildings and installations. There will be a range of installation types and resources to mine, creating ladders of advancement for prospectors and explorers.

◆ *Social*

We will be measuring the advancement of socially-oriented professions by doing such things as tracking the most successful writers, storytellers, musicians, tavernkeepers, etc. Separate ranking ladders will track the success of these relative to other players playing the same sorts of game.

Interdependencies in professions

No single profession should be able to master the entire game. Instead, players will have interdependencies. Pilots will need to interact with engineers on the ground to obtain the ship upgrades they want. Owners of installations will need to purchase energy, and manufacturers will need raw materials. Even the social professions will require the eyeballs of other players to get anywhere.

Party system

A system for players to group together and share in the benefits of advancement will exist. It will also permit group communication.

Clear milestones

The advancement system will rely on very clear milestones so players will always feel like they have a goal to strive towards. In addition, reaching the milestone will be celebrated by the game in some fashion, so that the sense of achievement is real.

Socializers

The Socializer player type is primarily interested in other people. Not merely for socializing, but also in terms of measuring influence on others, social power over others, group formation, and other such politicized dynamics. They rely strongly on constructed identity and communicative abilities, and tend not to be interested in formal game mechanics.

Avatar personalization

A high degree of personalization of your figure will be available to all players, from the very outset of the game.

◆ *Range of possible appearances*

Players will be able to customize:

- Body type
- Skin tone
- Hairstyle
- Hair color
- Facial hair
- Eyes
- Nose
- Cheeks
- Mouth
- Chin

◆ *Customizable clothing*

It will be possible to wear a wide range of clothing, ranging from the standard adventuring equipment to formal wear for special occasions, and have it display on your avatar. This clothing should layer, and in addition, should be fully component based, so that you can mix and match parts, as well as create them in any color.

◆ *Gesture system*

We definitely will include a wide range of "emotes" so that players can express basic actions such as bows, curtsies, waves, hugs, etc. Beyond that, we'd like to also have a skeletal animation system that allows players to design their own basic moves.

Systems of communication

We must include a wide range of communication facilities in the game (see the section on communication for details). But the socializer will want more than that: they want to be able to record conversations and events for later perusal, for constructing stories out of, and for bragging rights.

◆ *Logging facilities*

Filterable logging facilities will enable players to set up logs that are neatly pre-categorized by date, output in HTML if the player so chooses, and with only the type of text required (eg, everything, leave out news items, etc).

◆ *Screenshot ability*

A remappable hotkey for taking screenshots will exist. It should be configurable to instantly switch camera angles as well, so that the player can arrange the camera in advance. Shots will be saved separately, with timestamps.

Socially oriented professions

Socializers in most games have no formal role to play in the game. In *UO* there was great success with adding professions that were tailored for social players. In *PO* we wish to take this further by not only creating socially-oriented professions, but creating a sub-game whereby the socially oriented professions can be ranked against one another.

◆ *Musicians, artists, and writers/storytellers/reporters*

Roleplayers and socializers love to tell stories, write down news, draw pictures of their characters and other people's, and even write music inspired by their favorite game. We will support this within the game, so that players can not only do this within the game (with export capabilities to standard formats like HTML, GIF, and MIDI), but can actually earn in-game money by getting "royalties" based on the number of views/listens their work gets. We can then create "charts" of the top music, top books, top musicians, top news reporters, etc.

◆ *Tailors and other craftspeople*

We'd like to investigate the possibility of using deforming meshes to allow players to craft unique "templates" for clothing and sell the patterns, thus allowing them to make a living off of being a clothing designer. This might be applicable to other crafts as well.

◆ *Funplex operators*

The equivalent to *UO* tavernkeepers, funplex operators will be able to charge for their services, and will have a range of specialized addons to their business and building that create added value for their space. As an example, they would be able to install a jukebox that showcases specific musicians and charged money for plays, and would be required as businesspeople to seek out new tunes, thus supporting the socializer community.

Founding and running cities

Ultimately, socializers are about community-building. *UO* had great success with the player town dynamic. We intend to support player towns even further, by allowing them to be formalized.

◆ *Forming a city*

Once a specific amount of unique characters/accounts registers intent to create a city in a given location by building there, the town is now eligible to officially move beyond village status. To become official, the owners of the buildings there must declare themselves a town and select a governor.

◆ *What a city means*

Cities are eligible for the following special installations/buildings:

- “safe zone” generators
- stock markets
- commodities markets
- cloning facilities
- public meeting or entertainment facilities

All of these have ongoing costs taken from the city treasury. The “government hall” however does not have ongoing costs, and is the location where citizens “vote” for a governor, as well as providing a meeting facility and an interface to the city control functions held by the governor.

◆ *Powers of a governor*

The governor is selected by a simple “currently loyalty is to this guy” system. Any citizen of the town may change their loyalty at any time. The governor can use the city control facility in the government hall to change parameters of the city:

- Whether or not the declared loyalty of a citizen is publicly displayed or not (eg, whether the city encourages strong-arm tactics in politics)
- The degree of taxation on citizens and what form it takes (property tax, head tax, etc)
- When and what to build in terms of special public buildings
- Whether to demolish a building. This incurs a “buyback cost” which is paid to the owner of the building, but can be done on *any* building in the city.
- What the parameters of the safe zone are and what activities are allowed.

Explorers

Explorers are players who are interested in discovering all they can about the game and its workings. To make their game interesting, the game must be big, deep and always changing, so that there is always something to discover.

Planet generation engine

Planetary maps will be generated from a fixed random seed. This allows us to store a huge amount of planets in a fairly small amount of database space, and saves us the time of handcrafting the maps. A wide range of planetary styles should exist, including jungle, sand, water, poisonous atmosphere, etc. Concomitant with this will come a system that generates special features, such as cave systems, etc. This will assure that we always have places to explore.

Mission generation engine

Random events will occur constantly, and be fed to the players via the news ticker and mission board. These events will generate missions that players can fulfill. Examples include rescue of stranded pilots, search for alien artifacts on mysterious planets, or take out alien enemies on ground or in space.

Array of professions

The wide array of professions will in itself appeal to an explorer, who will, given time,

Ongoing narrative elements

A rich backplot and a gradually unfolding storyline will also be a fruitful area for Explorers to investigate, as they like figuring out the intricacies of plot.

Killers

Killers are out to exercise power over other players. This may take the form of power-brokerage or political standing, or simply player vs player combat.

Politics and economics

We hope to create in *PO* a wide array of alternate forms of PvP conflict so that the sole emphasis does not fall on killing as a means of exercising power. To that end, we see three areas as being particularly fruitful in that regard:

♦ *Guilds*

The guild structure in *PO* will be flexible enough to allow for a wide range of possible organizational structures, so that political conflict within guilds can arise.

♦ *Governorship*

Playing the politics of becoming a governor, and then being a complete bastard who rules the city with an iron fist sounds like a great outlet for those who seek to get power and hold it.

♦ *Economic domination*

Monopolies are unlikely, but aggressive business tactics including physically attacking the markets of rivals, or intentionally finding ways to drive their stock price down, should create a great deal of interesting conflict within the game world.

PvP planets

We will make use of spatial methods for separating player killers from peaceful types. Wilderness planets will largely be unsafe areas where the justice of Confed has not yet reached. These will be PvP arenas as well as places where you can start building villages and the like, and eke out a living in a wild frontier before the area is sufficiently civilized to make it a safe zone.

◆ *Sabotage of installations*

Resource miners will be drawn to investigate wilderness planets, because they are more dangerous and therefore less competition for the resources exists. And that means that their installations are vulnerable...

◆ *Attack cities*

Players who wish to found cities will have to resist the attacks of player killers until they are well-organized enough to formally become a city with a safe zone. In addition, some cities will choose not to be safe zones in order to preserve the atmosphere of a frontier town.

Space combat

Space combat will provide a huge amount of killer-oriented activity, of course. Most space will be considered to be a PvP area.

◆ *Piracy*

Pirating ships that are traveling through dangerous shipping lanes will be a primary activity, as will be fighting against pirates.

◆ *Warfare*

Alien ships will serve as convenient enemies when we need to generate excitement by having random warfare events and missions.

Community

Ultimately, the goal of any online game is to create a thriving community around itself. Both inside and outside the game, it must be easy for players of common interests to band together, form groups with some degree of identity and persistence, and form communities.

1. The game will support a wide range of **communications channels** to encourage player interaction.
2. The game will offer robust support for players to form **companies and guilds** of many types.
3. The game will endeavor to fulfill all of Dr. Amy Jo Kim's **principles for community building** on the Internet.

Communication channels

Privateer Online will take advantage of the science fiction setting to allow a wide range of communication tools of all sorts.

Spatial

Spatial communication methods are intended for players who are physically near each other in the world to communicate with one another. Ideally, there should be multiple methods for display of this output:

1. in a separate pane on the interface
2. overlaid on the regular game display
3. above the head of the speaker (obviously, this latter one may cause texture memory problems, and we must also be careful as to what camera angles it is useful for).

♦ *Standard speech*

By default, merely typing on the principal part of the keyboard is speech. Players will be able to configure the game to use "modal" speech instead, whereby a specific key must be pressed in order to enter speech mode (a la 3d shooter games). Speech will be audible only for a specific distance, with character attributes affecting the sensitivity of their hearing.

Customizable output colors

Every player will be able to customize the color of their speech, so that players can have different "voices."

♦ *Distance communications*

The equivalent of "tell" will be possible—this is peer-to-peer private messages that are instantly sent from person to person. We will fictionalize this using comunits that we simply assume every player has. For fictional and gameplay reasons, we may make some areas cause interference with comunits. Other players cannot overhear comunit traffic.

AFK and answering machines

It will be possible for players who cannot receive comunit messages (or who do not wish to do so) to set up a message to serve as an autoreply to the person sending the message. In addition, messages received will be stored (up to a certain buffer size) so that when the player can read comunit messages again, they can catch up on what they missed.

Ignore

You will be able to ignore comunit messages from specific people if you so choose.

♦ *Shouting*

An alternate form of standard speech invoked via a special key will allow you to reach a far greater distance with a shout. However, use of shouts will wear you out, so that you cannot abuse the privilege.

♦ *Whispering*

This method of semi-private communication allows players who are in close proximity to talk to one another semi-privately. Characters with good hearing attributes may be able to overhear whispered conversations, but under normal circumstances, these conversations are private. Others can, however, tell that the conversation is going on.

◆ *Group tell*

Using the game's party system, players will be able to create "group channels" on their comunits.

Multichannel broadcast

Global chat capabilities are key for building a community environment, but structuring them in such a manner that abuse and spam is avoided is challenging in a game of this scale. We will make use of chat channels via player comunits, but will give players an array of tools to police the channels themselves.

◆ *Chat channels*

Standard chat channels may be created at any time by a player, and they can be passworded. The original creator of the channel retains operator status for the channel even if he departs the channel in the interim. The channel automatically closes if all participants leave the channel. A full array of IRC-like commands exists for communicating in these channels, and players can choose to have the output directed to either a separate window pane or to their main screen. Players can also speak directly into a channel by prefacing their speech with some special keystrokes.

◆ *Guild channels*

A special type of channel, guild channels are persistent, and are part of the guild structure. These channels automatically relay to all online guild members, though members may choose to turn off reception of messages. The head of a guild or company can set specific other members to have ops privileges in the channel.

Delayed peer-to-peer

Players will not always be able to use direct methods of communicating, because sometimes the person they wish to reach will be offline. Therefore delayed peer-to-peer messaging will be required.

◆ *In-game messaging*

PO will make use of the OWO Mail system developed by the Tools and Technology group. We will provide an in-game interface to this system that allows players to write internal game messages to one another using the same design that will be in use at the time by UO and UO2.

◆ *Mailing lists*

Hopefully by this time, OWO Mail will support mailing lists for guilds and the like. If not, we will endeavor to add it as part of our development cycle.

Output filtering for text

All text output in the game (of which there will be a considerable amount) should be capable of being filtered.

1. Obscenity filtering and word replacement should exist via a user-definable list of strings.
2. Facilities for completely ignoring text created by particular individuals or accounts should exist.
3. Display of the text should be redirectable to separate window panes, to overlay the main window, or in the case of speech, to sit above the speaking character's head (UO-style) so that players of different preferences can configure their play environment the way they wish.

Context embellishers

Direct player to player communication is not the only important means of player communication. Some forms of communication are more important as embellishers of the game context, providing a means to see and feel players' impact on the world.

◆ *News tickers*

A special comunit channel, and possibly a group of them divided up by topic, should exist for disseminating major news. Players should be able to have the news ticker running continuously on their screen should they so choose, or view it on the website. They should be able to filter news items based on news type (player achievement, economic news, PvP status, deaths, towns, etc) and priority.

◆ *Logging*

Logging facilities should exist in the game so that roleplayers and achievers alike can log events and use the logs for bragging rights or merely for a sense of history. Similarly, a remappable key should be capable of taking screenshots which are conveniently numbered and dated and placed in the game directory for later use by the player.

◆ *In-game books*

A small but important group of players will seek to chronicle in-game history via in-game books. These books should be physical objects within the world, and authorship should be tracked, so that reading files created by specific players actually confers status on the author in a tangible manner ("royalties" perhaps).

◆ *Recorded music*

Similarly, players should be able to write music in the game, and obtain royalties and standing on top ten charts based on how frequently other players play their music.

◆ *Bulletin boards*

Threaded bulletin boards must exist within the game. If these bulletin boards can also be dumped out to the web, even better. There should be password protection on some bulletin boards (guild-specific ones) if the guild so chooses.

Companies/guilds

The ability for players to form large-scale groups with definite identities is a major draw in online gaming. *Privateer Online* must support this with strong facilities for guild creation, identity, and organization—and these guilds must require no administrative intervention.

Forming guilds

Players will be able to form companies (which are *PO*'s term for guilds) on the fly, at any time, by expending a significant amount of in-game currency. Guilds will, however, be required to maintain a minimum membership in order to keep from being disbanded. Characters must periodically check in with the guild's headquarters or they will be removed from the roster, in order to minimize data storage. Guilds must have a headquarters, a physical location somewhere.

◆ *Types of companies*

In general, guilds will be "companies"—they will have a specific type so that they can be ranked against other guilds of the same type. A given company can only be of one type. Typical examples of companies might include:

1. Mining companies
2. Funplex (entertainment) companies
3. Energy providers
4. Mercenary companies
5. Pirate organizations
6. Brokerage
7. Umbrella

Companies will be able to declare themselves to be affiliated with other companies of type "Umbrella," so that large guilds which might start multiple companies can still be under one umbrella.

Brokerage companies are ones that exist for the sole purpose of trading stock.

◆ *Company identity*

Companies not only get their own comunit channel, but they must have a headquarters, which they can decorate in various manners that only companies can. They can pay to have their guild information advertised in the news tickers. They are ranked against other companies of the same type, so they can measure their standing. If we can support it, they will also have special logo-building capability.

Companies have a special shared bank account which can be accessed by members. Players can pay money into this bank account, or can (if they are of high standing in the company) withdraw money from it. A company's standing against other companies is measured in part on the money in the bank account.

◆ *Companies on the web*

All public information about a company should be visible on the web, in a manner similar to the way we present guild information from UO.

The Stock Market

One of the special, unique twists that will make *Privateer Online* special is the ability for players to play the stock market. The “stocks” are actually other players’ companies, so you can speculate on the success of other players in their game endeavors.

By buying stock in a company, you increase the guild’s bank account, and can receive dividends if the guild leaders so decide.

The stock market will support a full array of means of purchasing and selling stock. You will be able to buy and sell stock via the web, and you will be able to do it by putting limit orders in on specific prices that you wish to buy or sell at, so that transactions can occur whilst you are offline or not playing.

◆ *The company bank account*

Every company has a bank account into which any member can freely pay in money. This is the means by which companies of different types are ranked: the more money the company has in their bank account, the higher they are ranked.

Adding funds to the bank

Any player can add money to the company bank account at any time. Top contributors are tracked so that the company leadership can reward them if need be.

Withdrawing funds

Only the guildmaster and selected other individuals may withdraw funds from the company bank account.

◆ *Stock*

A company begins with no stock publicly available for trade. The valuation of the company is based on the cash on hand of the company and the current valuation of all issued shares. Valuation counts twice as much as cash on hand, to create an incentive to work the stock market rather than hoard cash. We use the company’s stock valuation to rank the company against other companies. Highly valued companies can also get special incentives (eg, become a top ten bakery and you can get special decorations for your shop, advertising, a spotlight on the website, or special baking-related missions from the game).

Issuing stock

The guildmaster and designated other individuals may issue stock. They select an issue price if the market price for the stock is currently zero (an IPO). They also choose how many shares to issue.

Buying stock

Anyone may bid for the stock on the open market. If all goes well for the company, when stock is bought, they receive the money for which the share was purchased and it goes back into the company bank account.

Selling stock

Any stockholder can sell stock on the open market, for whatever price they choose to list it at. Of course, someone has to be willing to buy it. In this case, the stockholder gets the money for the sale.

A member of the company can also disintegrate stock they own, thus converting it back into cash that goes into the company's bank account. This is a method used by the company to generate cash, when they are in need to liquid cash assets and don't care so much about valuation or standing.

◆ *Possible future additions*

Dividends, stock splits, and the like can be added to the system post-launch or during beta testing if there is a demand, but the above system should prove innovative and exciting enough for the initial launch

Amy Jo Kim's Community Principles

Dr. Amy Jo Kim is a consultant and expert on community building on the Internet. She articulated nine principles for community building that we will endeavor to follow. Most of them have already been covered elsewhere in the document, so here we will just quickly address some of the key areas where we feel the *PO* design will support community formation.

Thematic neighborhoods

The ability to create thematic neighborhoods is a part of online spaces that Amy believes is very important. Players will gravitate towards the neighborhoods they regard as "their own."

◆ *Planet metaphor*

The planet metaphor allows us to create a wide range of distinct and unique spaces with different tones. In addition, there are specific features that create even more strongly thematized neighborhoods:

PvP planets and safe planets

The geographical distinction between safe and PvP areas will be our method for handling playerkilling. Players will naturally sort these out into two distinct types of neighborhoods.

Governing planets

The characteristics of a governed city will depend heavily on the governor and his supporters and the citizens of that city. As a result, the player-run cities will be differently themed neighborhoods.

Showcasing member contribution

We will strive to showcase the contributions of players to the game community in concrete ways. Most online games do a poor job of this, showcasing the members only on the website and rarely in any organized fashion. We will attempt to provide mechanisms that showcase major contributors within the game as well as outside it.

- ◆ *Social professions*

The social professions such as musician, writer, and news reporter offer an opportunity to showcase the contributions that are traditionally done completely outside the game.

Whereas these major contributors end up without any formal standing in other games, in *PO* they will have in-game standing as a result.

- ◆ *Leader boards*

We will showcase top players of the game in a myriad of roles via a huge range of leader boards and ladders. Individual professions, companies, overall standing, etc, will all be tracked and top ten lists generated both within the game and on the website.

Evolving member profiles

The abilities described elsewhere in this document to change professions, change clothing, etc, allows for an exceedingly high degree of modifiability of the player profile.

Personalized services

We intend to blur the line between the game and real life by offering personalized services for particular accounts.

- ◆ *News delivery*

Players will be able to filter the type of news they wish to receive, and even have it emailed to them or delivered on the website via a news ticker.

- ◆ *Website news*

Using Broadvision for our customer profiling, we intend to offer customized services via the website.

Leadership infrastructure

Allowing player community leaders to actually gain standing and take on formal leadership roles is very important in generating community.

- ◆ *Counselor program*

We will have a Counselor program equivalent to whatever *UO* is running at the time, to create leadership roles for those whose focus is helping other players.

- ◆ *Companies*

We will have a flexible fealty system in place for the guilds and companies, to allow leaders to arise within guilds and take on special responsibilities.

- ◆ *Governors*

We will offer the ability for players to become governors via popular acclaim, for those who seek leadership of in-game communities.

Events

Events of various types are key. The facilities must exist for events, commemorative celebrations, periodic ritual celebrations, etc.

- ◆ *Member-run events*

We will work to provide the artwork and facilities necessary for players to host their own events and run their own storylines.

- ◆ *ORIGIN events*

We will also provide tools so that the Live group can run events and storylines post-ship.

Guiding newcomers

Making the newbie experience a welcoming, friendly one is a basic part of adding to the community.

- ◆ *Greeters*

We will make use of a greeter program like the one designed for *UO* to hook up helpful players and new accounts.

- ◆ *Incentive to assist new players*

We will create a mechanism whereby elder players are given an advantage (perhaps a tithe of earned money?) for bringing a new player under their wing. This could perhaps be done via company recruitment.