Initial Brainstorming and Design: Storytelling
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Purpose: Storytelling has always been an important component of the Sims universe. We have found that many players use the game as a sandbox for creating and playing out their own stories. The album tool in The Sims was intended to address this type of play, and, indeed, players responded by uploading stories and pictures of their Sims. Like with all components of the game, we want to make this gameplay experience fresher, newer, and bigger in The Sims 2.

The new storytelling system must be designed with the goal of being simple enough for entry level players to use *without sacrificing the capabilities for complex storytelling*.

This document is intended to loosely propose a possible storytelling tool, and, most importantly, spark discussion on how it can best be designed and implemented to augment the Sims 2 experience.

Overview:

The new storytelling tool should mix the simplicity and open-endedness of the Album Tool from The Sims with a dynamically updatable WebLog (or "Blog") type content delivery system. With a more dynamic storytelling system, players could:

-   Create serialized stories without having numerous disjointed journals

-   Create online blogs for the sims, allowing them to vent about their housemates, share the uncertainties of their love life, and give their perspective on the world.

-   Create family journals that detail the life moments of their members

-   Do a hundred other things that we couldn't possibly expect.

A dynamic content system would give Sims and Sim families a greater "living" presence on the web. While an album can be constructed and forgotten, an online journal changes and evolves – the product of a living, breathing personality.

The popularity of Blog style personal content delivery is made clear by the huge membership numbers of sites like Diaryland.com, Blogger.com, and LiveJournal.com. LiveJournal alone boasts over 500,000 *active* users (over a million members), with a very diverse makeup in terms of both age and gender.

Primary Tools:

The Media Tools

Screenshot Tool

> The screenshot tool allows the player to simply take a screenshot (a la Alt-Print Screen) of their game.

> Size: Small (320x240 region), Medium (640x480), Large (800x600), Custom(click and drag)

> Quality: Low, Medium, High
> (Do players *use* the current quality settings?)

Video Capture Tool

> If the game is currently in live mode and not paused, AVI video capture begins immediately. If the user has activated the tool while the game is paused, capture begins when the game is unpaused.

> Size: Small (region), Medium (region), Large (play area), Custom
> Quality: For Local Use (High Quality), For Web (Low Quality)

FUTURE: The Scripted Playback Tool (Deterministic Play) ?

> While this tool probably be incredibly difficult to implement by the shipping of Sims 2 time, but could, in the future, provide a solution to the bandwidth and download time issues of AVI capture. While the recipient of a video taken in this fashion would require every piece of art (skins, objects, etc) in the source footage, the file size would be greatly diminished and could even utilize user-placed cameras. Could potentially be very interesting if bundled as a "make your own Sim movies" function in a future "Silver Screen" type expansion pack.

The Media Bin:
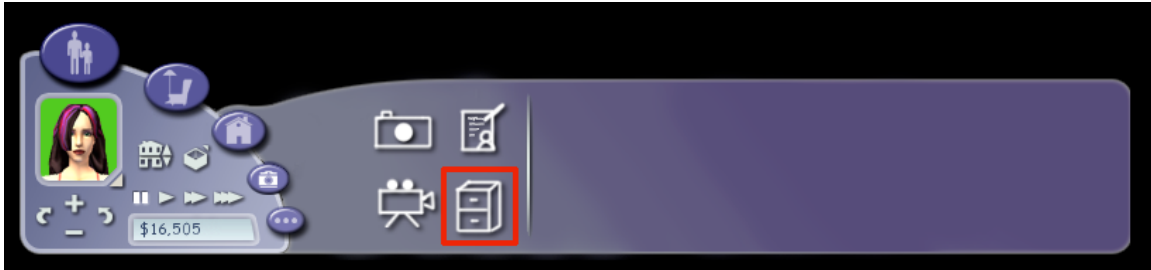
Organization:

First level sort: select a family
This is the family whose lot the image or movie was captured in. The
current family should be the default choice.

After selecting a family, the player is presented with thumbnails of all the
pictures and movies they have captured for that family, starting with the
most recent items.

Functions:

Accessing the Media bin gives you access to your files, allowing you to
delete unwanted media and save files to disk such that they could be
conveniently accessed by other applications, such as Premiere or
Photoshop.

The Editor:

Send Update to Web:

Locally saves the current update, and uploads a copy to The Sims 2
Website.

Save Update:

> Saves the currently created update to disk.

Adding Text:

> A player can add a new text entry to their update by typing into the text field. Every paragraph the player writes creates an empty media box, which can hold an image or video clip.

Embedding Screenshots or AVIs:

> By dragging and dropping items from the media bin to a media box, a player can reinforce their post by including pictures and movies of events or happenings in their Sim universe. (If creating a simple family photo album, you can just use paragraphs as picture titles.)

Additional Information:

> It would be possible to bundle any of the following information about any Sim mentioned in the posting.
>
> Age
> Family Simoleons
> Current Core Motive Values
> Personality Values / Zodiac Sign
> Current Job Track / Level
> Last interaction
> Life score
> Most recent big life moment
> Most recent small life moment

Website Features

Layouts:

> Users can choose from a number of prefabricated albums, or they can create their own, so long as they fit our guidelines.

Guestbooks:

> The guestbook provides one of the biggest paybacks for users of the system. This area allows other Sims users to comment and give feedback to the author or to the Sims themselves.

Webrings:

Rings allow users to connect their family websites by hyperlinking. Rings can connect users sharing a common interest, architectural style, or family lifestyle. It's up to the players to define their rings.

Downloads:

Visitors to a family site can download the family, their house, or any related custom content.

Rating System:

"Rate this Album" is a required field on every album. This allows us to sort albums based on popularity.

Most Visited:

These are the family sites with the most hits in the past 2 weeks.

Most Active:

These are the family sites that receive the most frequent updates.

Known Uncertainties

What happens when Sims move out of the house? How will players continue to chronicle their actions in a way that makes sense? Neighborhood connections?

How will we deal with profanity? Will the community be self-censoring?

Other Thoughts

Individual Sim web diaries / blogs?

Mood indicators?

Family Trees for navigation?