



Media Release

VastPark licences NICTA's Distributed Network Engine technology

(20 March 2008) NICTA, Australia's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Research Centre of Excellence, has signed a commercial license agreement with VastPark, a leading virtual worlds platform provider.

Researchers at NICTA have developed a decentralised network engine for virtual worlds that can scale to millions of users, thereby enabling creators to develop and deploy online games and virtual worlds more efficiently and cost effectively.

Massively multiplayer online (MMO) applications, such as large multiplayer games and on-line virtual worlds, have attracted an enormous user population on the Internet. In fact, thousands of users can be on-line simultaneously in the same virtual world. This creates a significant challenge for the creators of virtual worlds.

The traditional client-server approach does not scale affordably as server capacity needs to be upgraded to meet the anticipated demand for a service; rich media content requires the underlying network to be upgraded to handle the expected network traffic; and central servers are a single point of failure and require constant maintenance.

"This is great for VastPark as we want to make it easier for anyone to create and deploy their own virtual worlds and games without the headache of centralised server infrastructure. We also want to provide a unique user experience on our platform: we want users to know they can turn up at a location and no matter how many people are there, they should be able to see their friends rather than find out they've been stuck on separate servers as often happens in games today," said Bruce Joy, CEO of VastPark.

Craig Presti, Lead Developer of VastPark said: "If we want virtual worlds to become a standard way of interacting online then we want to enable a better user experience. What's great about NICTA's Distributed Network Engine is how well it integrates with the VastPark platform and that it allows VastPark be the first to solve some of the elusive problems for virtual worlds platforms such as how to make them extremely economic to run and how to handle the "flash mob" problem (where suddenly a massive crowd appears on one world). This really makes the VastPark solution a complete and elegant system."

NICTA's agreement with VastPark will provide VastPark with access to the Distributed Network Engine and the team behind it. The agreement also provides the NICTA team with a commercial platform to conduct a large-scale trial, and a commercialisation path with VastPark as an industry collaborator.

"NICTA's technology will reduce the cost of maintaining expensive game servers by delegating data processing to individual participants," NICTA P2P project leader Dr Santosh Kulkarni said. "This will also improve resilience to failures by removing the single point of failure and reduce game traffic in the core network, improving system performance."

"VastPark has a mature platform that has received excellent reviews from the industry pundits," he added. "When you combine such a platform with cutting edge technology from NICTA, it has the potential to shake the virtual world space."

“This is the beginning of what we expect to be a long-term relationship with VastPark as a partner in the development and commercialisation of the virtual world technology coming out of NICTA,” Dr Kulkarni said.

VastPark’s CEO, Bruce Joy said: “VastPark is about making virtual worlds useful and convenient to create and deliver and NICTA’s technology helps extend VastPark by allowing thousands of simultaneous users to meet each other without creators needing to pre-invest in expensive infrastructure. This is potentially revolutionary stuff.”

“This engine will complement our existing VastServer network engine that is designed using a traditional client server architecture. NICTA’s engine will mean that we can offer our world creators a level of low-cost scalability that is just not achievable otherwise. I can’t wait to see the impact this has on the market when it is released,” adds Joy.

“I am delighted that NICTA is entering into this agreement with VastPark,” NICTA Victoria Research Laboratory Director Professor Rob Evans said.

The new networking technology is now being integrated into VastPark and there will be an announcement later this year about when the beta testing will commence. Testing is expected to begin towards the end of 2008.

About VastPark

VastPark is a virtual worlds platform supporting an ecosystem of creators, consumers and user generated worlds. Built on five years of research and development and focussed on effective open standards, VastPark features free tools that enable users to create and publish 3D virtual worlds quickly and easily. Communities can create and monetize their own highly interactive worlds and empower their users creativity.

About NICTA

National ICT Australia Limited (NICTA) is a national research institute with a charter to build Australia’s pre-eminent Centre of Excellence for information and communications technology (ICT). NICTA is building capabilities in ICT research, research training and commercialization in the ICT sector for the generation of national benefit.

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NICTA was established and is supported by its members: The Australian Capital Territory Government; The Australian National University; NSW Department of State and Regional Development; and The University of New South Wales. NICTA is also supported by its partners: the University of Sydney; University of Melbourne; the Victorian Government; the Queensland Government; Griffith University; Queensland University of Technology; and The University of Queensland.

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