

MMORPG Creative Scenario 2

Communication
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General Rules

1. The whole point of a MMORPG is character interaction. Chat channels increase convenience but ignore the whole range of interaction between characters in a social setting. They are to be avoided.
2. Communication takes place at all times through In Character (IC) channels. There are no “tells”. Communication can be instantaneous, (mail can arrive the instant it is sent), and even be similar to tells, but it would take place within the myth structure of the game, for example, enchanted conch shells which carry a group’s voices to each other.
3. No spamming allowed or possible. Characters can’t communicate with a whole area at once (no area-wide chat), except in certain circumstances, like raid groups.
4. Communication that occurs in public is observable. Two characters may whisper together, and no other characters may overhear, but they will observe the whispering.
5. Voice chat is possible in a MMORPG, especially for consoles.

Interaction

I communicate with my guild¹ through a token, a representation of some sort². A cleric might carry around and pray to a small icon he carries, a trader might consult a lackey, a thief might spin a small dagger, anything. I’m a hunter, or similar class practicing animal husbandry, and so my guild seal is a small bird. The bird indicates that there are new postings on the guild board³, so I head to the guild to check.

I arrive at my guild, greet my guildmates, gossip for a while, and then check the board. I see that a new quest has been posted, and accept the quest⁴. I’d like to do the quest with a friend, so I go outside and summon my animal companion, a hunter ability.

I whistle, and a falcon swoops down and lands on my arm. I tell the falcon to see if any of my friends are around (logged in)⁵. He flies off and comes immediately with a list. I could tell him to send messages to all of them, but instead I choose to talk to Arthur, a mage, and I send the falcon off with the message, “Do you want to quest?”⁶

Almost immediately my falcon returns, and seconds later an air elemental swoops in, says, “Yeah, sure. Meet at the market?” in my friend’s voice, and then flies off. I command my bird to tell Arthur, “Yeah,” and I head for the market.

As I walk through the crowded marketplace, I pass groups of characters in conversation. As I approach each group, I begin to hear what they're saying. Because the marketplace is loud, I have to get close to overhear⁷. I spot Arthur on the other side of the market (friend's names stand out because they're a different color), and head over.

We agree to do my quest, I share it, and we head out, chatting as we walk.

Important Mechanics

- (1) In this case, a guild is a class-based, structured organization, with NPC trainer/guildmasters, as opposed to a player-run group. Player guilds can also be present. Guild halls would include various guild specific areas and NPCs, including trainers, shops, practice areas, and hangouts, all varying from open to the public to guild member exclusive.
- (2) Having a token, rather than a chat channel, is important. A guild chat reduces the roleplay value of having a guild. Having to go to the guild hall to get information provides excellent opportunities for social interaction.
- (3) A guild board is where quests, jobs, news, advice, and rules are posted. It would be a natural gathering point for a guild, and should be in a semi-public location, suitable for hanging out. More in-depth information on the guild could be found in a guild library.
- (4) Quests could be one-time-only, such as a player-driven bounty, or class specific, like a quest to gain proficiency with a new weapon, or repeatable, like a kill or courier quest.
- (5) Friend lists are very important. Different classes would have different ways of keeping tabs on friends. A crafter could make items for this purpose also, such as enchanted necklaces and such. And all classes should have a way to be notified when a friend logs in. In my example, my falcon could swoop down and tell me that a friend logged in.
- (6) Communication at distance should be possible, quick, and transparent, but still work through IC channels. Sending my falcon is exactly like sending a tell, and instantaneous, and so is Arthur's air elemental, but they stay within the framework of the mythos of the game, and don't break immersion.
- (7) Voice communication would be heard over the headset. The game's normal sound effects would come through the normal speaker channels. In this way, you can control the volume of the voice comm. independently. The volume of another character's voice should fall off at distance, so characters would tend to stand closely, as in real life. In groups, and in combat, voice comm. should be clearer, louder, and easier to hear.

Extended Mechanics

Voice chat presents a number of problems. If you are an old guy playing as a young female character, your natural voice would break immersion for other players. This could be overcome by voice-augmentation technology, which I believe would help immersion in general. A huge barbarian would have a very deep voice, an elf wizard would speak in reedy tones, and a bard could change his voice to portray other characters.

There is also the technical problem of handling that much voice information at once. All I can say is that I believe it is possible, and good luck.

Several classes would be very dependant on social interactions, by their nature, and would benefit from extra communication abilities. Traders, for instance, could summon clerks to check their job boards. Since traders already have plenty of opportunity for interaction, indeed their class duties are primarily driven by character interaction, we can cut down on their required inter-class interactions.

Bards could throw their voices to an entire area, but only in limited amounts. Thieves could mask their conversations, or use subtle signals. The class breakdowns and the thief class really warrant separate scenarios.

Characters could also communicate with guilds. For example, I could instruct my falcon to go to the paladin's guild and beg for help, and a quest would appear on their board requesting aid for my character.

Importance

Character interaction is the main draw for a MMORPG, and while a well-organized chat system is very helpful, and does allow characters to interact on some level, it is only scratching the surface of the interaction possible.

Meeting another character face to face is a much deeper experience. You can see each other's equipment, gauge their appearance, everything. It provides a yardstick, a method of comparing game experience and level. This interaction, measuring up to your peers, provides a huge draw, a major force to continue building on your character.

Taking out chat systems, and forcing players to congregate at guilds and job boards, provides a mechanism for increasing face to face interaction, increases immersion, and especially coupled with voice communication, will create an unparalleled social draw. And in MMORPGs, social interactions are everything.