

## RocketOn Adds Monsters, Quests for Launch

Wagner James Au, Friday, August 8, 2008 at 5:15 PM PT

Judging by the geek cocktail buzz I keep hearing over [RocketOn](#), the web-based “parallel virtual world” being developed by the Bay Area startup with the same name, I’m not the only one excited about its Sept. 15th launch. RocketOn CEO Steve Hoffman and Co-founder Eric Hayashi stopped by the GigaOM office this week to give me a preview — including an advance look at some recently added features that should help boost RocketOn as it comes out of alpha.



While RocketOn is web-driven, it isn’t a virtual world chatroom like [Lively](#) or [IMVU](#); instead, *the web itself* is your playspace. A Flash-driven browser plug-in with Java and open source code running the back end, RocketOn adds a transparent layer onto every web page you visit; your avatar sits atop of the layer, where it can socialize with other users. In the screenshot above, for example, three RocketOn avatars engage in shenanigans on top of GigaOM. The girl on the left is commenting on the funky glasses worn by the guy pictured in [Stacey’s post](#), while the two dudes on the right are watching a heated battle between their pet monsters.



“Monsters are what the guys want,” Hoffman explained to me, grinning. “It’s that simple.” They’re still working on the combat system, Hayashi added, but the basic idea is that players can own the monsters, as well as train them, give them special powers, and take them into arena-style battles with other players.

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The other new RocketOn feature they showed me is depicted in the second screenshot: interactive quests with characters that take players on adventures across the web, in search of clues and precious items to accomplish their mission. (In this case, to Wikipedia, to help a wayward explorer repair his time machine.) Many of these mini-quests will fit into a larger RocketOn narrative, while others will be developed by their sponsoring partners; Hayashi suggested a campaign built around an action movie, with clues strewn throughout the web that would ultimately lead to the film's home page. (Fun for players — and a revenue stream for the company.)

In development since April 2007, RocketOn literally began with a dream in which Hoffman envisioned tiny people walking across the web. As he explained, while we know there are thousands of individuals simultaneously browsing popular web sites at any given time, what if we could actually see and interact with them in some meaningful way? The desire to enable such interaction is definitely growing.

### **Some fast facts about RocketOn:**

#### ***Revenue***

- Free to play, RocketOn's main revenue streams will be through the sale of virtual currency (for ROCKETON item purchases) and advertising deals.
- There are two types of virtual currency: Rocketpoints, which are earned by playing, and Rocketdollars, which are purchased with cash (\$5 for 500 R\$) though credit cards, Paypal, SMS, etc.

#### ***Play Features***

- If thousands of users visit the same web page, RocketOn creates multiple "room" overlays associated with that page, for 8-12 users each.
- Besides combat monsters, users can own, feed, and train virtual pets — although they will wander off into the web if you don't care for them well enough.
- Virtual items can be dragged and dropped into the web playspace for more interactivity (i.e. fireworks that explode, or notes that can be read by other users.)
- Avatars have user profiles and experience points; leveling up gives you access to more exclusive items and secret rooms.
- While players can interact in a wide variety of ways, there are no hugging or

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kissing options. ("IMVU is all about that," Hoffman told me, "and we're sorta in a different space.")

### ***Company Stats and Plans***

- RocketOn is backed by \$5 million in Series B funding from [D. E. Shaw Group](#)
- The company tracks the most popular sites for users with a viewable leaderboard; it eventually plans to aggregate and leverage the data.
- While it's currently teen-focused ("Those will probably be early adopters," said Hoffman), the company has plans to broaden the demographic appeal.
- RocketOn intends to open up its system to developers, companies and independent artists in order to create new games, avatars and items with revenue share.
- It's not planning to create a Facebook widget; instead, you'll import Facebook functions (friend feeds, etc.) *into* RocketOn.
- Hoffman envisions RocketOn's virtual currency evolving into a microcurrency similar to frequent flier points for use with partners' products, etc.
- As RocketOn grows, said Hoffman, "We kind of want the audiences to segment" all over the Internet, socializing on sites based on their interests.