

By April 2008 Dumitrescu, Games Editor

[World of Warcraft Is Not a "Real" Success](#)

Free-to-play MMOs could be the next big thing

The MI6 Marketing Conference, that takes place in San Francisco and concentrates on the business side of games development, featured a lengthy panel discussion about the MMO business modes and the potential for growth that free-to-play games could have in the near future. The most important speakers were Daniel James of Three Rings, creator of Puzzle Pirates, Andrew Sheppard of Outspark, the company that makes Fiesta, Min Kim of Nexon, developers of MapleStory and Craig Sherman, representing the virtual world Gaia. Their main idea is that the business model of the [MMO](#) needs to change in the near future. Gaia's Craig Sherman stated that there are some 800 million teenagers that would like to take part in an on-line game, in a MMO, and that this number makes the apparent success of World of Warcraft, which is around the 10 million subscriber mark, seem like a low number. His original quote was: "There are 800 million teens in the world. That's not a success." A success, he thinks, would be to target an attract at least 10% of that 800 million population. Min Kim declared: "There's a whole audience of tweens and teens out there who want to engage, but don't have access to plastic," and only the free-to-play business model can attract those gamers to on-line worlds and on-line games. There seems to be a virtual (pun intended) agreement between the panelists that the MMO of the future needs to be free and incorporate as much social networking possibilities as it incorporates gameplay. Also it needs to be less time-intensive than the current MMO games, letting the player decide how much time he wants to put in and when he wants to play, rather than forcing a clear gaming schedule on him. The MMO of the future also needs to be [casual](#) in that it allows easy access to the core gameplay mechanics and has a really low learning curve, unlike most of today's persistent on-line worlds.