

Resource Review

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Name of reviewed item:	Simventure
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Review:

Simventure is a business simulation game which allows the user to run a virtual business enterprise for a maximum 3 year period. The game is built around a sole trader scenario in which the business goal is to build and sell computers at a profit. The package is particularly well suited to an educational or training environment where the learner is able to play the game, with tutor support available, and incorporate all the business lessons learnt via a course of study.

Simventure should provide an excellent adjunct to any business studies or enterprise type course. At Craven College we have used it alongside business start-up programmes and personal growth programmes. We are currently looking at integrating the package with our business studies suite of courses.

The areas in which the game player can make decisions are generic enough to allow

it to compliment any business curriculum. The level of learning may be adjusted by altering the level of difficulty within the game parameters (from Easy to Fiendish!) The game is best introduced via tutor demonstration. This can be achieved by taking the learners through a series of basic decision making steps, which demonstrate the nature of the game. Decisions made by the game player cover all the key areas relating to running a business: e.g. Product (operations,) Sales and Marketing, Finance and Organisation (people and premises.)

Simventure provides a virtual 'Business Adviser' who is on-hand to point out key observations as the business game proceeds. For example, a lack of market research will prompt the reminder "You should carry out some market research before you make any more decisions about your business'.

University or College faculties/departments which are trying to build enterprise skills into their curriculum can easily use Simventure to address the core decision making skills and knowledge. In addition, we have used the package at Craven College to build our own staff understanding of business knowledge and skill. Further, I have visited a local University which has installed Simventure on a number of machines available to under-graduates looking to set up their own businesses in the 'incubation unit' resource centre on campus.

Original fears about the lack of tutor control over game parameters (i.e. inability to change the game scenario from product/manufacturing to service sector,) were quickly allayed due to the extensive decision making options open to the user. I have not, as yet, found an issue which is unique to the 'service sector' which cannot be addressed via the currently available game scenario.

An initial time investment is required by those that intend using the package to teach business skills. Time needs to be spent acquainting oneself with the package and designing opportunities to integrate the software with existing teaching and learning methods. It is suggested that 'total mastery' of the package is not required by the tutor as the unexpected nature of the impact of some business decisions may well lead to the greatest value discussions for the learners.

Simventure does include some useful features for tutors and there is a Tutors Notes section which includes 'How can Simventure be used as a teaching aid' and a section on the evaluation of student progress. There is also a glossary of terms.

It is my experience that Simventure may be fast assimilated by the learner. It has been used successfully with entrepreneurs, looking to set up their own businesses. This event enabled the entrepreneurs to run the Simventure game in competition with other entrepreneurs. The winner was the entrepreneur who made the highest profit during the game time allocated. (Simventure does include a section on using the package for competitions.) Frequent stops to the proceedings allowed full discussion around the issue which emerged. These included: the benefits but potential pitfalls of holding a large amount of stock, how market segmentation could be best achieved and what tailoring the design of a product/service to the exact needs of a client target market really means in reality.

In my opinion the Simventure game provides a highly powerful teaching and learning tool which is fun and easy to use. Its power, regarding teaching and learning, is that it can be used to demonstrate the actual impacts of decisions made by the leaders of businesses. The tutor may, through demonstration, reveal the thought process behind key business decisions and the learner can then see the impact of the

decision on the performance of the 'business.' The tutor may also gauge learner potential relating to entrepreneurial competences by allowing the learner to 'take the helm' and observe the resulting level of business success or failure. Weaker business decisions made by the learner may be pointed out by the tutor and a discussion may be had to reformulate a better decision.

The software Team at Venture Simulations is keen to generate an almost continual raft of improvements via user feedback and they have been interested and eager to find out what the user experience is like. Feedback from our learners and tutors has been used to modify, improve and generate the next version of the package.