

# **New Web service puts entire world up for sale**

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A group of young Montrealers wants to bring e-commerce to the masses, and they're putting the world up for sale, potentially down to every city, every block, every building and all their inhabitants.

Or rather, a virtual copy of these assets, which anyone can buy, promote and sell for more than she or he bought them for.

This is Weblo.com, a Web service going live on Tuesday that combines the social networking of MySpace with the do-it-yourself marketplace of eBay.

It works like this: A user buys a virtual deed from Weblo to a real-world asset, be it a building, a country, an Internet domain or the managing rights to a celebrity. That user then creates a profile page for that asset and tries to attract other users to it with interesting content.

The more visits the asset receives, the more its value increases. The user can then get a cut of the ad money Weblo receives, or resell the asset to other people.

"People will get paid for what they already do on the Internet, like making pages, using webmail, chatting and posting photos," said Sean Morrow, the 25-year-old director of marketing at the firm's University St. office.

While social networking and user-generated content have been around for years, no service has paid users for their popularity. The most-viewed profiles on MySpace and YouTube can amass only Internet fame. Non-users might be left wondering why someone would pay real money to buy a fictional title to a territory.

"Think taxes," Morrow said.

If someone owns Montreal, he gets a cut of every property sold in the city.

Morrow said he has people in line to buy California for \$50,000. Montreal will go for \$211. The initial prices are set by Weblo, based on factors like the population of a domain. But in the case of a celebrity or a domain name, it's a more arbitrarily set figure, based on perceived popularity or potential earning power.

Weblo has a massive database of all countries, their states or provinces, cities and landmarks therein. Famous people and known domain names are also for sale. If it's not in the Weblo database, users can create and buy deeds for anything else, as long as it has a real-world presence.

Weblo is the brainchild of Rocky Mirza, a Montrealer who made his fortune in such Internet marketplace sites as Unique Auction.com and Swapedo.com. He wanted his next project to be much bigger and accessible.

Users can make up to 50 per cent of the ad revenue Weblo pulls, depending on what kind of premium account they have.

Weblo is being funded with \$2.6 million in private capital. Unlike other Web start-ups that long to be bought by giants like Microsoft and AOL, Weblo is aiming for an IPO within nine months of its launch.

Weblo's PR director, Kelly Ekins, said domain resellers are already clawing at its doors.

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