

I Just Bought Ottawa

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At Weblo.com you could own the Trump empire for less then what you'd pay for dinner and a movie.

I now own the city of Ottawa. Yep, you heard me. It's all mine. I bought it for all of US\$55 today. I plan to install a water slide at the Peace Tower with the money I save by nixing MP's golden parachutes (they can use the slide exit). As well, I'm now managing the career of Vegas comedian Carrot Top, and I also plan to install him as my Deputy Mayor. I figure politics and prop comedy just go hand in hand.

No, I haven't pulled off the greatest land swindle since the Dutch bought Manhattan. I'm talking about my experience at Weblo.com, the ultimate monopoly-like game where virtual [copies](#) of celebrities, properties and web domains are yours for the taking& if you have real cash to spend.

The brainchild of Montreal's Rocky Mirza, [Weblo.com](#) is best described as a parallel universe where players can buy assets with real money and reap real returns for everything from advertising to celebrity management to property taxes. For example, you can buy a domain such as [computers.com](#) and share in ad revenues from the site (weblo is wooing real advertisers for this). You can even link this "in game" site to your actual real world [website](#) and use it as a promotion tool. Any non-brand specific domain which exists in the real world is available to buy in the Weblo world. The same goes for provinces and cities - you can buy Ontario for a mere US\$16,000 and, believe it or not, Rocky tells me he has a waiting list to buy this virtual province when weblo.com launches on September 26.

This is no short term investment though. According to Mirza, it could take the owner of Ontario as long as three years to make his or her investment back, unless they manage to flip it faster. Of course, there are risks - not the least of which is whether Weblo will actually be around in three years.

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"Weblo is a place for people who missed out on a number of different booms (the) first time around in real life," says Mirza. "But, more importantly, it's a fun social [networking](#) site where social networking is competitive. Whatever you are buying or doing in Weblo exists in the real world already. It gives people a secondary perspective on issues and trends in the real world."

When you purchase assets in Weblo you don't need to sell those assets. If you own Toronto, you can pass bylaws and collect taxes from people who might want to join Weblo as residents of Toronto. It's the best kind of income: residual," states Mirza.

One thing I should make clear here is that, in Weblo, a "city" is a nothing more than a [website](#) . The designers have purposely avoided any kind of 3D game element in order to make it as user friendly as possible to the widest possible audience. Mirza points out that Weblo will market advertising for your city site and share the revenue from those ads. You also don't need to know anything about web design because Weblo provides browser based wizards to design the sites. However, the quality of the content on your city site will dictate your traffic and potential profits, meaning that this could be more time intensive than owning a 3-legged puppy.

But, how can you be sure you'll actually see any money from someone who might buy a domain or other asset from you? No one can buy anything in Weblo unless they have real money in their account prior to purchase, once a purchase is made the money is transferred to your account. User account money for buying assets will not be used by Weblo for anything outside of the game economy.

The Weblo virtual world will meet up at times with the real world too. For example, they plan on virtual elections of political leaders from countries such as the U.S. and Iran or North Korea, which will be followed with a mock real world summit and a press release of suggested solutions to world problems.

Frankly, Weblo is less of a game than it is a marketing opportunity. And, while the novel approach might remind some people of a pyramid scheme, that would be unfair since players do not recruit other players, who would then be obligated to pay them a percentage.

Only time will tell if any of the participants in this project will actually profit from the experience. Now, if you will excuse me, my Deputy Mayor must have an issue because he's waving a rubber chicken at me.