

# CONTINUUM: TABLE OF CONTENTS

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# Overview

## High Concept

A massively multiplayer, persistent universe game set in an immense living game world with a fresh cyber-punk twist running under the Omniworlds system.

## Vision

Games like Everquest, Asheron's Call and Ultima Online have shown that Massively Multiplayer Games are an extremely popular and profitable genre. At this point there are very few of these games available on the market and those available are in their first generation of technology and gameplay refinement. In addition, all of the massively multiplayer games on the market today concentrate on the traditional fantasy based setting a la *Dungeons and Dragons*<sup>TM</sup>. We believe that a game set in an equally popular cyber-punk inspired world will add a fresh new face to the types of games and draw in new gamers while still attracting the core role-playing crowd that has made this genre so popular. Now is the time to bring *Continuum* to the market and establish a unique franchise. To accomplish this goal we will build a new studio around a core group of game industry veterans with proven track records and skillsets.

## Genre

Role Playing Game (RPG)

## Target audience

Teen-Adult. *Continuum* is designed to appeal to fans of role-playing games and those who enjoy social interaction online. Its futuristic setting, immersive environments, character animation, spectacular graphic effects and role-playing depth will attract players from many different genres.

## Type

Massively Multiplayer Persistent World (MMP)

## Target Platform

Intel Pentium III/AMD Athlon  
64 MB RAM  
3D Accelerated  
CD/DVD-ROM  
Multi-channel Digital Audio

## Distribution Model

CD/DVD-ROM  
Traditional retail software outlets  
Aggressive electronic distribution  
Additional revenues from customer subscriptions

## Executive Summary

*Continuum* will require approximately a \$5.4 million investment over the course of two years.

## Continuum Highlights

Massively multiplayer universe supporting thousands of simultaneous players

Unique Cyber-punk inspired immersive gameworld

Next-generation character animation brings the world of *Continuum* to life.

Breakthrough 3D rendering engine for unprecedented detail and high resolution graphics

Tremendous character customizations avoids the 'populated by clones' feeling.

Huge equipment, weapons and items list

Scalable and extendable technology to avoid overcrowding problems experienced by other MMP games.

## Unique Selling Points/Competitive Advantages

*Continuum* features the following points advantages above its competitors:

- **Advanced Scalable Technology** - On high-end systems, the aim will be to create visuals which are extremely comparable to movies and pre-rendered sequences. The world of *Continuum* will be extremely realistic, with as much rendering technology as we can utilize using the technology available two years from now. We are not abandoning entry-level systems, however, as our technology will be scalable. The game will still be fully playable on lower-end systems, just not as graphically impressive.
- **Unique Genre** – As far as we know, no announced MMP is utilizing this exact genre of game. *Continuum* will feature cyberspace environments, mutant and cybernetic technology, and a web of corporate intrigue which will make the world a very interest place, indeed.
- **Story** – Acutely aware that most MMPs up to this point have been pure hack and slash, we intend to hire writers to make sure that the world has a cohesive story, and the player character has a reason to exist. Each player will have his own agenda, and unique quests to accomplish, to avoid ‘camping.’
- **Solo dungeons** – *Continuum* will also feature ‘solo dungeons,’ areas which will ‘break off’ from the full game. These will be unique zones for players to experience, maybe one or two groups at a time, in order to experience that ‘we’re alone in the dark’ feeling.
- **Serverless Model** - The zoneless model will increase the sensation of ‘being in a world’ as opposed to being transferred from server to server. In addition, our model of having one big, contiguous world will allow us to scale our game as necessary, as opposed to running into the artificial boundaries created by the ‘zone’ models.

## Development Restrictions

A two-year development timeline has been dictated for this project.

# Project Goals

## **Character Investment**

Continuum is designed to cause players to invest long hours in their character, and then relish the fact that they've put in their time. As characters develop, their power, and wealth increases, and this is repaid by the fact that they can take on ever-more hostile environments and creatures. Powerful characters can be easily identified by just looking at their avatars, and players will have an interest in upgrading their characters to the maximum extent possible. The unique look of the characters, combined with the time investment, will insure continued playability, unlike the earliest generation MMPs.

## **Engaging Environment**

The world of Continuum has a variety of different terrains, buildings, and underground systems to explore. Characters will be able to go for a long period of time without seeing another character, if they so desire, or they can spend all their time in cities for maximum exposure to other players.

The world of Continuum will also be significantly darker than the happy-fun world of Everquest or Ultima Online. Part of the world is in ruins, and much of the world has been turned into a desert wasteland. There are many stories of corruption and intrigue awaiting the player's discovery... This unique genre will appear to an older audience, interested in exploring the world and what it has to offer. The sales of the immensely popular *Snow Crash* and *Neuromancer* books demonstrates peoples' interest in this genre.

## **Long-term play**

The game will be large enough to support many hours' worth of play per day over a year's time. Extensive security technology will be necessary to insure that character development may not be short-circuited, so players who are high level, will have earned that rank.

## **Advanced Graphics**

Given the state of the art in graphic technology, the look and visual representation of the world of Continuum will be second to none. Borrowing heavily from established genres like *Blade Runner* or *Fifth Element* will allow Continuum to 'feel' like a post-modern, over-industrialized city, with all the urban decay and renewal progress that an environment like that would imply.

## **Multiplayer interaction**

One of the key elements in this game will be the ability to interact with other players, for good or for evil. Players will be able to band together to take down a common foe, or work towards opposite ends (i.e. quests on behalf of one corp or another to accomplish a goal, while the opposite goal may be given to the opposite corp).

The economy will also be primarily player-driven, although we anticipate keeping controls on the economy by getting NPCs more involved in the economy (i.e. they'll also sell and buy items through vendors).

**Variety in characters**

Players will be able to customize what they wear, what sort of body-types they have, even to the point of getting cybernetically enhanced body parts. Characters will plainly display their level and relatively power levels, further encouraging people to invest time and effort into their avatars.

# World Overview

## History

*Continuum* takes place in the distant future in an Earth-like land where the digital world has become a reality, a place where man and technology have merged irrevocably into one. The game world is seemingly endless, populated with towering cities, wide-open landscapes and even cyberspace itself. Megacorporations have taken over the daily operations and lives of the planet's population, but at an expense. Greed and self-interest have driven the corporations to become autonomous, government-like bodies, and the Megacorps have seized control of all civil and governmental functions. The people of the time, not having enough organization or money (all major wealth has been centralized and controlled by the Corps) to fight the Megacorps, exist in a state of resigned compliance. Most citizens live for the Corps, and die for the Corps.

At some time in the distant past, governments as we know today waged war upon each other, using various weapons of destruction. This destroyed the ecosystem and most of the smaller cities in the world, and left the rest to atrophy into deserted towns. Most people, technology, and supplies are now centralized in the cities, with hydroponics and other artificial food sources supplying the masses, while fusion powers the huge manufacturing plants located in various regions in the city. Beyond the cities lie untamed wilderness and desolate ecoscapes encompassing many different weather conditions from permafrost to desert, from jungle to forests. Many nomadic groups and mutated creatures travel these wastelands beyond the corporate grasp making them dangerous places.

## Cities

Cities aged testaments to the toll that technology and greed have on human existence. Existing for hundreds of years, each city bears the history of its existence, like rings on an aged tree. As each city grew, they reflected the changing political climate of the times. During the first Corp war, large regions of the ground level were laid waste by experimental weapons and bio-engineered mutants, and as a typical Corporate move, instead of rehabilitating the ground level, it was simply 'paved over.' A new Ground level was built, effectively leaving the ground level to those mutants and undesirables to their own dark world, while 'normal' humans lived above, on the new Level 1 platform.

Level 1 was a project of huge cost and labor. In a rare demonstration of cooperation, the MegaCorps ended their wars when they saw that they were costing themselves huge amounts of money, (never mind destroying the cities and causing millions of people to lose their lives). The platform effectively isolated the ground level from the tops of the buildings, effectively burying the reminders of the past. The ground level became a dark underworld; a shadowy reminder of the mistakes made by the corporations.

## Gameplay Overview

Gameplay in *Continuum* revolves around character development and social adventuring in groups. Through adventures within the world of *Continuum* players will be able to seek out experience, which in turn will help advance the capabilities of their character in the world. Experience can be gained via adventuring and combat or through the fulfillment of a variety of quests given to players by non-player AI characters (NPC's) residing in the game world.

A distinct goal of *Continuum* is to provide an unprecedented level of customization options for each player's character. The first thing a player needs to do to is create a new character that will represent them in the game. It is this process that will determine the player's appearance, statistics, capabilities, alignment and skills in the game. The player can choose from a wide range of character classes and races. Player selectable races include Human, Mutant and Cyborg each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Character classes include roles like Hacker, Soldier or Juicer each with distinct capabilities and special abilities. For example Soldiers are great fighters and have the ability to take a lot of damage in combat while using the most variety of weapons. A Soldiers technical ability or psionic capabilities are quite weak however. It is this type of balance and class tradeoffs that will make the land of *Continuum* a diverse place with roles that will provide entertainment for every type of player. Different character classes and races will provide a distinctly different experience for the players, permitting not only replayability, but variety for players who choose to run multiple characters.

After creating the initial character and entering the game the sky is truly the limit as to the customization and adventures of that character. Starting off as a "newbie" the player will be placed within one of the cities of the game in a relatively safe area where their adventure begins. From this point on the fate of that character is in the hands of the player. They will be able to equip their character with clothing, weapons, armor and a variety of useful gadgets. As they begin to search out adventure they will meet many fantastic creatures and people to interact with in the game world. They can clothe their characters in unique garments that reflect the player's individual tastes. They can seek out other players and form groups to create more powerful adventuring parties. Adventuring and social interaction are at the core of *Continuum* and what the designer's believe is the force that will draw players back to the game time and time again. There is always something to do in *Continuum* providing nearly unlimited entertainment possibilities and a powerful gaming experience.

## Core Technology

*Continuum* will be based on the Omniworld network technology, using a proprietary engine. The technology will be fully scalable, allowing top end machines to draw incredibly detailed models and animations, while using lower poly-count models on our minimum required platform.

*Continuum* will have a secure client and custom rendering engine. Hardware acceleration will be required for the client software. The client renderer will have BSP technology, terrain generation, volumetric lighting and fog effects, light-mapped effects, and full multi-resolution modeling and boned and skinned characters.

# High Level Overview of Design

## Technical Brief:

### One Liner

Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Game, with groundbreaking visuals and extensive character development and customization options.

### Salient Technical Points

- Multiplayer, Internet only
- High-resolution mip-mapped textures.
- Dynamic lighting.
- Dynamic sounds.
- Particle systems.
- Indoor BSP-based rendering engine.
- Outdoor Terrain Engine
- High-security, fault-tolerant networking code
- Skinned and boned characters
- Multi-resolution modeling

### Development Strategy

Initial efforts will be devoted towards getting the rendering engine and tools necessary for development up and running, while the networking portion is developed concurrently.

Extensive efforts will be necessary to develop the rendering engines necessary to make *Continuum* a reality. The game demands a look and visual representation of the environment far beyond what is currently available on the market.

The following table is an enumeration of some of the new graphic technologies that will need to be created for *Continuum*:



New Technology Description	Time to Implement
<p><b>BSP Technology</b> Indoor scenes will require this to prevent polygon counts from spiraling out of control</p>	10 weeks
<p><b>Multi-Texturing</b> To achieve the high quality visuals necessary to compete in this crowded market segment, it will be necessary to create a completely new texturing scheme, capable of supporting multi-texturing (Specular mapping, bump mapping, environmental (reflection) mapping, dynamic textures (bullet holes, player decals), and also procedural textures.</p>	6 weeks
<p><b>Radiosity Mapping</b> <i>Continuum's</i> rendering engine will also feature the advanced technology of Radiosity Mapping.</p>	4 weeks
<p><b>Dynamic Mesh Generation</b> <i>Continuum's</i> environments will also need to support dynamically-generated meshes to support NURBS (non-uniform rational B-line spline) surfaces.</p>	8 weeks
<p><b>Shadows</b> <i>Continuum's</i> render will feature accurate shadow generation, using stencil buffer technology.</p>	5 weeks
<p><b>New Character Animation Technology</b> <i>Continuum</i> will require substantial character-animation technology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skinning of characters, to achieve the smooth, seamless look.</li> <li>• Inverse kinematics, for real-time, computed motions.</li> <li>• Playback system for canned, stored animations.</li> </ul>	<p>4 weeks 8 weeks 2 weeks</p>
<p><b>Swppable Skins</b> Part of the character-uniqueness prized by players is the ability to customize their characters to the greatest extent possible. <i>Continuum</i> will need to allow textures to be swapped out on a per-face basis.</p>	2 weeks
<p><b>Portal Surfaces</b> Games like <i>Quake 3</i> have raised player expectations by including portal surfaces, i.e., surfaces which allow the player to see through to other areas (i.e., <i>Quake 3's</i> teleport surfaces). This is a very nice effect, and very impressive as well.</p>	6 weeks
<p><b>Optimization</b> Lag-tolerance is an essential portion of this game's appeal. Significant time will need to be spent optimizing the game for highest possible performance.</p>	12 weeks
<p><b>Refractive Surfaces</b> Refractive surfaces will go a long ways towards making believable liquids in the game. This will allow the user to see through the surface of a body of water, and experience the distortion which happens in reality.</p>	4 weeks
<p><b>Particle System</b> A new particle system will need to be developed to handle the indoor environment.</p>	4 weeks
<p><b>Collision System</b> A collision system and will need to be developed, to handle the BSP technology, and be able to interface with the lag inherent in an internet-based system.</p>	8 weeks

<p><b>Physics System</b> A new physics system will need to be developed to handle the collisions.</p>	6 weeks
<p><b>Character/Environment System</b> Time will also need to be allocated for creating a system for character/environment interaction. (The environment will need to be tagged with attributes, such as climbable, walkable, swimmable, etc.)</p>	2 weeks
<p><b>Multiplayer Networking</b> There needs to be substantial development time devoted towards making a stable, secure server/client system, as well as additional networking improvements such as client prediction, movement smoothing, and fault tolerance. Extensive testing will need to take place over the Internet to insure that the game is really multiplayer capable, even over the Internet. Playing over the Internet will also require specific technologies, such as client prediction, fault tolerance, and dealing with lag.</p>	6 weeks
<p><b>Tools Architecture</b> A tool architecture overlay over a rendering package must also be developed. This will become the foundation for all future tool development dealing with 3D art and level design.</p>	6 weeks
<p><b>Tools Learning Curve</b> Time must also be allocated for programmers to get up to speed on whichever 3D package we choose for developing products and tools. This will happen alongside of the artists, although their focus will clearly be different.</p>	3 weeks
<p><b>Scripting System</b> A complete scripting architecture must be created for game designers to be able to trigger events based on locations, (players crossing boundaries, etc.), integrate quests, design characters, etc.</p>	16 weeks

These estimates have been taken from an established programming team, and times required to simply to create the technology. The above times must be multiplied by a factor of three in order to fully calculate the time requirements. (1x to create the technology, 2x to debug the technology, create the tool which supports the technology, and to debug the tool.)

The above time to create the above technology is **122 man-weeks**. After the correction factor is applied, we are looking at **366 man weeks**, or approximately **7.5 man-years**. This does not include time required to build the full networking support system, debugging tools, etc. With concurrent development across several people, this allows us to accomplish our goal of completing development within 2 years.

**Tools**

- Unknown 3D Modeler: Used for creation of all 3D game models.
- Photoshop 5.5: Used for creation of textures, 2D elements and special effects.
- Microsoft Developer Studio 6.0: IDE for development (code generation, debugging and building).

## Art Brief:

The game world will be composed of many identical cities, separated by wide expanses of wastelands. Because of our 'serverless' model, this will allow us to generate one city, and replicate it, creating distinct gaming areas, without having to generate enough art and areas to support 100,000 simultaneous users. More cities may be added on as new areas are discovered.

Each city is composed of different zones, owned by different mega-corporations, lending each zone a distinct look and feel. These zones may be separated by walls or transit tubes to give them a sense of isolation, or we may choose to make several zones adjacent to one another for that crowded feel.

The cities are megaliths, towering above the surrounding landscapes, and surrounded by walls. As one approaches a city, they should be dark islands in the otherwise deserted and inhospitable wastelands, clearly visible for miles around.

Each city needs to be able to provide capacity for approximately 2500 players. As a working figure, we'll assume that each city has 9 corporate zones, and that each zone has a maximum capacity of approximately 300 players. In this way, we can start the rollout of the program with 3 or 4 cities initially, and install more cities as demand scales. The higher players will be encouraged to spread out as overcrowding increases, and will be allowed (by paying an in-game fee) to transfer their characters to other zones (or fly themselves there with a vehicle, if they're really bored).

At any one time, 5 out of 6 players will be out questing or gaining experience, as opposed to being in a town, thus we need to be able to handle gaming 'dungeon crawls' or other exploratory situations for up to 2000 players per city.

Regions between towns and cities will be handled as algorithmically generated areas, with designer-supplied landmarks. Deserts, jungle, plains, mountainous, oceanic and permafrost regions can thus be created very quickly, and then populated with cacti, abandoned vehicles, or deserted cities in relatively short order.

## Time/content estimates:

In speaking with artists, the following estimates apply:

- A relatively simple room can be done with a day or two's worth of work.  
A large, more complicated complex (i.e. a cathedral, office atrium) can be modeled within two weeks.
- Motion sets, once an established route is created, can be imported within a day or two.  
A character can be modeled in a week. 15 player characters, with approximately 20 generic scripted motions, and 20 distinct scripted motions each (e.g., walk, run, idle, sit, fire gun, pick up object, pick up large object, operate console, crouch, cast spells, take damage, etc.), and 50 different textures for each polygon face (not counting color-shifting). Estimated modeling and animation time – 15 weeks + 20 x 2 days + 10 x 15 x 2 days = **83 weeks total**

- Building Texture Sets – 750 texture sets, approximately **52 weeks** total
- 50 different types of NPCs, with approximately 5 scripted motions each, and 25 different textures for each polygon face.  
Estimated modeling and animation time – 50 weeks + 5x50x2 days = **150 weeks total**  
Building Texture Sets – 50 x 25 texture sets, approximately **80 weeks** total
- 20 different types of vehicles, with one or two animations each (take off, landing, etc.), and 10 different texture sets  
Estimated modeling and animation time – 20 weeks + 4 x 20 days = **36 weeks**  
Building Texture Sets – 20 x 10 texture sets, approximately **40 weeks** total
- 2D Icon design, UI design, etc – One full-time artist engaged for duration of project – **104 weeks**
- Pyrotechnics artist – For explosions, particle effects, etc. Engaged for **6 months**

For argument's sake, figure a 'zone' is made up of 9 city blocks. Each city block has a variety of smaller shops and buildings, and one large structure. Examples of the large structures might be:

Cathedral  
Office space  
Factory  
Warehouse  
Hydroponics  
Laboratory/Research facility  
Residential space  
Waste reclamation plant

Each one of these large structures will need to be carefully modeled, as well as creating each one of the smaller shops and facilities.

- Design/modeling/texturing each large scale structure, inside and outside – 1 month, total of **81 months**  
Design/modeling/texturing smaller shops – 1 week, estimate needing 50 shops – total of **50 weeks**.
- We'll have 6 distinct types of 'outside area' graphics. Plains, Jungle, Desert, Permafrost, Mountains, Ocean. Developing each one of these graphic sets will take about a month, including landmark graphics, total of **6 months**.

**Approximate total artist time commitment: 241 months, or 20 man-years.** With concurrent development across several people, this allows us to accomplish our goal of completing development within 2 years.

## Audio Overview

*Continuum* could potentially break new ground by using multichannel digital audio for all the music and sound effects while maintaining backwards compatibility via standard stereo encoding. The game will also support 3D positional audio API's like Aureal's A3D and Creative's EAX via Microsoft's DirectSound3D. Think of bullets whizzing across the front soundfield or deflections

echoing behind you. Environmental ambient effects like venting steam, rumbling engines and strange creature shrieks could all be put to use in *Continuum*. The soundtrack should fit the sci-fi theme. Dark electronic tracks and industrial beats would work nicely.

# Implementation Plan:

## **Phase 1:**

Early February: Upon approval of plan, Dave K. and Mark T. would leave current employer, making a clean break, and begin setting up facilities and continue working on design for product. Progress to this point has been extremely slow due to trying to juggle responsibilities of a full-time job and working on other issues at the same time.

### Objectives:

- Continue researching other competitive products
- Establish office space
- Decide on software infrastructure, complete specifying computers, design network
- Locate vendors for computer hardware
- Locate vendors for (cheap) office equipment
- Continue designing product, character design, concept art, more gameflow design, etc.

## **Phase 2: (4 weeks out)**

Take possession of office space, and set it up. Depending on legality of recruiting, we would then either bring the other people from current employer, or have them give notice earlier on. (Unclear, need legal counsel).

Bring lead engineer on to begin architecting game systems (rendering, networking, animation system, quest engine, tools subsystem).

### Objectives:

- Have a basic programming system architected, with milestones and time-to-complete.
- Intense recruiting, hope to have leads in place for all major system by the end of this time. Office needs to be up and running by the end of this time.
- More game design, character design. Renderings and models start to be built.
- Build network out.

## **Phase 3: (8 weeks out)**

Work begins on engines, and art for the game. Game design is 'finalized,' at least on paper. Implementation begins on tools.

# Competitive Products

These are the targets for which we must aim to surpass. These are the defining products in this genre, and we must scrutinize them, distill their best elements, and add our own unique mix of story and technology in order to make Continuum the best possible product.

## Released products:

### Diablo:

Blizzard's semi-massively multiplayer epic had much to offer in terms of graphic splendor, and the unique random-dungeon and random-item feature made replayability a strong point. However, rampant cheating and a relatively short 'max character' development time curtailed this game's long-term appeal.

### Ultima Online:

Lord British's vision of MMP was the groundbreaking product in this genre. Despite its limited 2D graphics and its extremely dangerous player environment, heavily populated by player killers, this game continues to be a strong revenue source for Electronic Arts. However, it's popularity has recently been overtaken by Everquest.

### Everquest:

The current darling of the Massively Multiplayer world, Everquest features a huge amount of items, and an enormous amount of highly varied playing. However, even this game is flawed by issues such as overcrowding, long periods of player downtime, and a seemingly antagonistic staff.

**Note:** This game was created by a staff of 70 people, and cost \$12 million to make. It has currently sold 250,000 copies, and has a subscriber base of 150,000, each paying \$10/month.

### Asheron's Call:

Microsoft's entry into the world of MMP is the largest world yet, and has not yet reached it's full potential subscriber base. A common opinion is that AC is not sufficiently 'different' or 'better' than Everquest to attract EQ's rabid users away from EQ's (admittedly flawed) game. EQ demands such an investment of time, that it's difficult to walk away from the long hours that have already been invested. AC features an interesting magic and liege system.

## Unreleased products:

### Diablo II:

A twist on the world of Diablo I, it looks like Blizzard will allow players to run their own 'unprotected' servers, while Battle.net will host 'protected' servers. Basically, the protected servers will have authenticated and secure characters, while users may have fun on the unprotected servers with one another, there's no guarantee that these characters won't be cheated or edited. Diablo II looks like it'll continue the tradition of gorgeous graphics, while enhancing the storytelling aspects further.

**Neverwinter Nights:**

A similar story to the Diablo II model, only being put out by the people who did Baldur's Gate, Black Isle Productions. Again, allowing users to run their own servers independent of Interplay's watchful eye.

**Anarchy Online:**

Another entry into the MMP market, but details remain somewhat sketchy at this point. Seems to be set in a semi-futuristic world.

**Atriarch:**

Another entry into the MMP market, but details remain somewhat sketchy at this point. Again, set in a semi-futuristic world, but with an emphasis on organic technology.

**Shadowbane:**

An upcoming entry into the MMP market, based in a fantasy world, but with a heavy emphasis on PvP play.