

Real time Business Simulation

By Jon Knox

Airline pilots and even young drivers begin – and then later hone their skills on simulators. Now, business decision-makers are being given the same opportunity to test their knowledge and skills without the risk of crashing in real life.

Based in Brazil, Tycoon Systems is one of the world leaders in multiplayer, on-line business simulation games. Automotive Industries (AI) spoke with Thomas Lehnert, founder and CEO of Tycoon Systems about the company and the newly-launched AI MASTERS CUP.

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AI: Tell us about Tycoon Systems

Lehnert: I originally started in this business in Germany in the early 90's, and we became the national leader in designing business games for media competitions and business education.

After moving to Brazil a few years back, I decided to re-think our whole approach, taking into account the latest developments in technology including increased bandwidth availability.

The result was the highly flexible IndustryMasters platform which you see in the AI MASTERS CUP – this really is the cutting edge of what can be done in our business.

AI: Why are Business Simulations becoming more widely used?

Lehnert: The Business Simulation space has been growing steadily for the past two decades. Like many hi-tech

developments, it has its origins in military applications. For example, you wouldn't expect an airline pilot to fly a plane without spending a large amount of time in a flight simulator. The same thinking is increasingly applied to training and developing business managers. Forward-looking corporations and business educators are using simulations to prepare and test their managers against developing business challenges. Realistic scenarios can be played out in the relative safety of a learning environment, with no risk to the business.

AI: What makes Tycoon Systems unique?

Lehnert: Definitely “Real Time!” Our IndustryMasters simulation platform works in “real time” on a web server – almost unique in our market. We specialize in computerized simulations which focus on economic and business strategy – with a difference. Other simulations require a technician to be in attendance to install programs, to collect player data decisions, to input these into a master program, print out results and deliver them to players.

When people use Tycoon Systems simulations, they can immediately see their own results, as well as those of their competitors. Everything is run on a web server and all that is needed is an internet connection and a standard browser. This allows Tycoon Systems to run business education classes all around the world at the same time so that anyone, anywhere can join.

We have also developed a system that is extremely flexible for our clients – we can simulate ANY business in ANY market in the world – quickly and fairly easily. “Close Customization” is our true skill. It also allows us to develop exciting on-line competitions such as the AI MASTERS CUP.

AI: Where did the idea for the AI MASTERS CUP come from?

Lehnert: The first business simulation that I developed for a media partner 15 years ago was a simulation of the automotive industry. This attracted more than 15,000 players every year, and ran for over five years. When Automotive Industries



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contacted Tycoon Systems earlier this year, I was impressed by the way the company works and decided to create a new Automotive Industry business simulation game that realistically reflects the challenges of today's situations in this sector.

AI: What is unique about the AI MASTERS CUP ?

Lehnert: We stage a global automotive industry event, in partnership with AI, which deals with real business issues that affect everyone working in this industry. Apart from the learning and development possibilities, this competition will be a lot of fun for everyone who joins in. It will also serve as a platform for discussion about some of the real problems facing us in these difficult times.

AI: Can players apply lessons learned from the AI MASTERS CUP to their daily work?

Lehnert: AI MASTERS is more than "just" a business game. It's a great learning experience. Participants can explore the structure of the automotive market, learn new approaches to real business strategy and marketing, and become familiar with financial concepts. By playing several simulation rounds this learning experience is strongly grounded and embedded.

AI : Who can play in the AI MASTERS CUP?

Lehnert: Everyone involved in the auto business. From people working with tier 1 and tier 2 suppliers, car manufacturers, car sellers etc.

AI: What technical setup do people need to participate in the AI MASTERS CUP?

Lehnert: You only need a computer with a standard browser and an internet connection (ADSL is best). There are no program

downloads or any installations needed. Experience in the auto industry is helpful in understanding the business issues – but not essential.

AI: Is there a cost involved?

Lehnert: Individual players pay US\$40 allowing them to receive over five hours of simulation playing time. Corporate multi-user packages are offered discounts for 10 or 20 user accounts.

Each participant plays up to five simulation rounds to improve his or her result. There is also a chance to win one of the sponsored prizes.

AI: What might be a winning strategy for the simulation?

Lehnert: We give players an online / downloadable guide to finance, business strategy and industry structure which gives some ideas and suggest various possible approaches. We sug-

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gest that players read this before trying a simulation for the first time. This is an extremely dynamic simulation, and we will depend on the players to come up with some interesting winning strategies. **AI**

