Medium length Press Text

**connect your world**

**One step towards a new reality**

*The trend towards Virtual Reality is steadily growing. The Graz-based start-up e.com has now jumped the bandwagon, presenting the first social network in the world capable of VR – connect. In addition, the app offers numerous additional and exciting features optimized for smartphones, tablets, and computers, such as chats and video telephony, in-app games, virtual pets, and a multimedia hub for news from all around the globe. And: The app is free of charge and absolutely data-secure due to end-to-end encryption.*

For about two years, e.com founder Michael Schöggl and his team have been working on this innovative form of a social network. Now, the big success is expected with the Kickstarter campaign scheduled for July. ”As our business model does not include selling personal data but financing through deliberate voluntary product placement, *connect* maintains each individual user’s private sphere,” explains Michael Schöggl. Still, the app can keep up with other social networks through its functions: the possibilities include chats, the sending of photos, videos, GIFs and stickers, as well as video and online telephony. ”Many people initially do not want to move to a new social network as they will not have any contacts there. But we have solved this problem “, says Schöggl. Through its integrated multi messenger, *connect* bundles messages from other messaging services such as Facebook Messenger, but also from email and text messages. This way, each user can immediately access his or her existing contact list on *connect*, and communicate with all of their friends – all of that nicely structured and connected in one single app.

**I can build my world**

Due to its intuitive operation, *connect* targets all age groups. The app is set up like a sort of virtual living room in which self-explanatory objects can be found. The camera on the desk, for example, stands for the photo function, the address book for the contact list, and the ball pen for messages. “The user surface is meant to be individualized entirely, just like a building block system — everyone can furnish *connect* exactly the way they want to,” Michael Schöggl describes the idea. Using the VR glasses, the virtual loft can be experienced in 3D, but a 2D version and a basic version, in which the loft is replaced by a desktop surface, is also possible. “This way, we can ensure that each individual user is content in his or her virtual home, and does not have to worry about unnecessary functions or complicated usage,” Schöggl summarizes.

**According to your own taste**

The app’s individualized character goes even one step further: Whoever wants to, can decorate their virtual loft with their own pictures or pieces of art. Also, the furnishing is left completely to the user, and this is where the financing of the app comes into play. Cooperation with businesses that offer their real-life products in the form of 3D models are in the planning. Using these products, *connect’s* users can then design their loft the way they want, all according to their mood and taste. Michael Schöggl states that “We will not force products onto our users; everyone is free to decide individually what he or she feels comfortable with in their virtual home.” A second financing pillar will be in-app purchases for extra functions or smaller games.

**A loyal companion**

An example for this feature is the virtual pet. An egg is available for 1 Euro, and after a while, a little chicken or an even rarer species, such as the crocodile or the turtle, will hatch from the egg. The virtual pet adjusts to the owner’s character traits. If scolded too often, it becomes shy, if it’s fed too much, it becomes chubby. With a little effort and patience, the little digital companion will even be able to perform some tricks.

**Media from all over the world**

For all those interested in global news, the media hub has to be mentioned: Different national and international books, magazines, radio- and TV channels, as well as internet media will be available to the user and can easily be looked through and filtered for specific articles and headlines. *connect* also offers a streaming function for TV shows, series, and movies.

“We look forward to finally showing the world that a small country like Austria can also play a leading role in social media and Virtual Reality,” concludes Michael Schöggl. Lastly, it takes two essential requirements to compete with the big names on the market; namely a great vision, and many people who believe in it.