

Rock Band 2 Avatars To Be Printed in 3D

By Eliot Van Buskirk [✉](#) August 25, 2008 | 10:16:29 AM Categories: [Music and Games](#)



The next iteration of guitar-based videogames, *Rock Band 2* (MTV/Harmonix, September 14), will offer something previous versions have lacked: the ability to buy a real-life figurine version of your custom-created characters. Z Corporation -- so-named for its printing technology, which handles not only the X and Y axes but also the Z axis for a total of three dimensions -- will manufacture a six-inch *Rock Band* Bandmate figurine out of your custom-created character, for less than the price of one ticket to a Rolling Stones concert: \$75.

Players will be able to use the game's normal avatar creation engine to "create variety of body styles, faces, makeup options, hair styles and tattoos," said Scott Harmon, Z Corporation's vice president of business development. "Users can also design a band logo and have that applied to a (virtual) T-shirt, and then you control clothing, footwear, hats and instruments."

According to him, Z Corporation is the only 3D printing company that can handle color. "You can't do this without our technology," he said.

Once a character ([video](#)) has been created within the game, it gets automatically uploaded to MTV/Harmonix's servers, where it'll be accessible via the web. You'll be able to pose position into a specific position, enter payment information and Z Corporation will manufacture one unit of your design using its bank of 3D printers. Harmon told us they're "about the same size as small- to mid-sized office copying machines."

Z Corporation's printing process ([video](#)) involves laying down a thin layer of powder in the shape of the cross section of the object to be created. An ink jet printer prints a "binder" in that cross-section, then a "build piston" hammers down to create that cross-section in plastic. The

process is repeated until the character is complete. Each one takes about a day to create, says Harmon, and the company "can double or triple capacity in weeks" in case demand grows intense. The goal, he says, is to expand capacity to the point that all orders will ship in under a month, no matter how popular Bandmates get.

The process offers a whole new type of merchandising opportunities for bands, videogames and other companies. Promotional figurines have been a big deal for years, but not with this degree of customization. According to Harmon, the door is wide open to create a wide variety of characters, as long as you don't include a band logo such as the Rolling Stones' trademark lips and tongue. (However, he said, the game's face-designing engine isn't so precise that one could make a character that looked exactly like Mick Jagger.)

"What you're dealing with on a global level is brand new way to deliver licensed content to consumers," said Harmon. "It's a multi-billion dollar industry. This could create a new branch of it, where consumers experience it not in a mass produced way, but interact in a selective and personalized way. MTV/Harmonix is visionary in picking up on its potential."

He said future examples could potentially involve manufacturing World of Warcraft avatars, customized South Park figurines and so on. "This is the beginning of a whole new way for consumers to interact with the content they enjoy," said Harmon.

I agree. If regular people are the new stars, we may as well be available as action figures.