

TREND BRIEFING

The Marketer's Guide To

Virtual Reality & Brands

Must-know information for marketers on how brands are creating virtual reality experiences to deliver entertainment and utility value to their audiences.





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Feature by **Julie Berry**.
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Publisher
PAUL LIDGERWOOD

Associate publisher & editor
PETER ROPER
peter.roper@niche.com.au

Sub editor
MADELEINE SWAIN

Art director
KEELY ATKINS

Design & digital pre-press
NIKITA BANSAL

Advertising enquiries
TYLER PAYNE
Tel: +613 9948 4978
tyler.payne@niche.com.au

Subscription enquiries
Tel: 1800 804 160
subscriptions@niche.com.au
www.marketingmag.com.au

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ABN 13 064 613 529.
1 Queens Road,
Melbourne, VIC 3004
Tel +613 9948 4900
Fax +613 9948 4999

(niche:)

Chairman
NICHOLAS DOWER

Managing director
PAUL LIDGERWOOD

Commercial director
JOANNE DAVIES

Content director
CHRIS RENNIE

Financial controller
SONIA JURISTA

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Foreword



Richard Brett,
group managing
director consumer,
Ogilvy Public
Relations Australia

All around us we are seeing new technology change the way we do marketing. Over the last 15 years we have seen the internet and then social media rapidly change the way we engage with audiences. Now we are seeing another radical revolution, with a suite of new technologies including virtual reality, algorithms, artificial learning, machine creativity and virtual personal assistants.

These technologies will have a profound impact on the way we engage with consumers. But while all this technology will change so much, it is actually having a fascinating, unexpected and juxtaposing very human counter-trend: it is bringing us all together.

As we embrace smartphones, social media and virtual reality, we are becoming more connected to each other. We are publishing, sharing, engaging and now empathising with real stories from real people from across the world, and sharing our universal human emotion.

Social media started our journey: we have become the creators of our own stories and we publish and share them relentlessly. This trend has been coupled with a decline in trust and credibility from the traditional message carriers: politicians, corporate spokespeople and celebrities (for more, read *In Mistrust We Trust*, by Ivan Krastev).

So the stories of our own lives have become those we engaged with of our friends, our family and even of strangers. Those that pull at our

emotions are the most shared. But now, with the arrival of virtual reality, we are able to put ourselves in someone's world and see and hear exactly what it is like to be in their shoes. These are the stories that are creating empathy, and are the stories that are working best.

The arrival of virtual reality and 360 video is creating an explosion of immersive and empathetic experiences. *Notes On Blindness* and *Nomads* allow us to experience a whole new world - putting us into someone else's culture and story, and feel their emotions and think their thoughts.

Toms created a hugely engaging piece of virtual reality content for Charity:Water, capturing what it was like to be a girl having to walk 30 kilometres every day to get water. *The Guardian* places you in solitary confinement for 23 hours so you know what it is like to be in the US prison system.

New media start-up Ryot created a sombre virtual reality experience that places you in the world of Syrian refugees trying to get to Europe.

Empathising with real people as a strategy is also gaining traction outside of technology. The success of The Swedish Number is a good example: just call a number and talk to a random Swede about their own country - only by talking to a real Swede can you understand what it is like in Sweden.

This is the new human empathy, powered by all of us. ▲

An aerial photograph of a city grid, likely New York City, is shown in a light teal color. This image is overlaid on a darker teal background. The text is centered and white, providing a high-contrast look.

FEATURE

The Empathy Machine

Everyone in the digital space is excited – and with good reason. Virtual reality is as big as that time the internet came to town and smartphones became grafted to our palms – and the training wheels haven't even come off yet. Julie Berry explores why this disruptive technology will impact our lives in a way even the most tech-savvy among us will struggle to conceive.

Until you put a headset on for the first time, it is hard to comprehend the VR concept and how it will fit in to everyday life. The better quality headset you can get your hands on, the better idea you will have. So, how are some of Australia's largest companies such as Google, Samsung and Getty Images staying ahead in this fast-paced, democratised environment, and what tips do they have for brands considering a sortie into this new channel for the masses?

The technology

Companies like Samsung have been looking at VR for more than a decade in different guises. Think 3D TV. Samsung Electronics Australia corporate vice president and CMO, Philip Newton says 3D TV was the first foray into trying to create some sort of VR type solution.

"But that obviously didn't provide the kind of necessary immersion that the headset does, so sometime later when the computing power that you can get in a handset grew – a couple of years ago now – we realised that we could do everything we wanted to originally do, in the one area, in the one device.

"Currently, you're talking about two separate devices – the handset and the headset – and longer-term, who knows? It could just be incorporated into one device. It's yet to be seen."

Newton suggests, from an R&D perspective, every scenario is being looked at, including potential for a Google Glass type development. For now though, Gear VR, released last November, has been well-received with some calling it the best on the market in terms of usability and price point. This makes up for trailing Rift and HTC Vive in graphics, with those technologies coming with a larger price tag and restrictive tethering requirements.

Things change quickly and, although Newton acknowledges that Samsung wasn't and still isn't across this disruptive tech, Gear VR was originally built with the mass market consumer in mind – a consumer device that everyone could use. "Was there discussion around verticals? Absolutely. What we didn't understand was, I guess, the depth and breadth of possibility, and that's really shown itself in the last 18 months," he says.

"VR was an unmet need that was just waiting to happen, and when we launched our developer products 18 months or so ago, that was the realisation. Since then we've just gone on to provide more and more quality and technology and processing power that consumers are telling us they needed, and that will continue for as long as consumers are using the product and wanting the product."

Major progress over this 18-month period is a common theme. Although Getty Images has been

Important distinctions

360-photo: similar to a panoramic image that has an extended left and right, these photos extend in all directions creating a 360-degree (or near-360-degree) sphere in which the viewer sits and can direct their view.

360-video: as above, but with a video. The viewer can direct the gaze, but has no control over the position or movement of the camera. By definition, assuming no pausing, the viewer will never see 100% of the action.

'true' virtual reality: a computer-generated environment – a video game – in which the player is free to direct the gaze, move the camera and even interact with the environment. Before long, expect gloves and other clothing that can produce tactile feedback for the user.

augmented reality (AR): computer-generated graphics over, commonly, what a device's camera is currently seeing. Think *Pokemon Go* or the lenses in Snapchat that manipulate a user's face.

collecting 360-degree images for the past five years, it was essentially directed by technology.

Stuart Hannagan, Getty Images Australia's VP of editorial imagery, explains the challenges faced. "It wasn't an easy thing to do five years ago, as a photographer, to go out, cover an event, do what they needed to do from an editorial perspective, capture great pictures, get the moment and then think about a 360-camera, which was a big clunky thing they had to pull out of a bag and put up a tripod. It was really hard work." Hannagan admits that back then they weren't even sure how they would be using the imagery.

The potential of 360 became clearer when in 2014 the hardware began to evolve. "360 cameras became incredibly easy to handle, to use and, all of a sudden, especially in the last 18 months, the cameras came out that didn't need stitching," Hannagan says.

The process evolved from taking a 360 picture on a very expensive camera and sending it off to be stitched, taking two or three days "if you were lucky", to today where Getty Images is able to upload images immediately.

Getty Images' head of global integrated marketing, Monica Bloom, says the company has visual anthropologists on staff to identify trends now and over the next five years. "We're looking at virtual reality as a much bigger area for us, so in the creation of the Virtual Reality Group it's really about how we create immersive images for our customers."

It is achieving this through technology such as 360 and Gigapixel, the latter so incredibly detailed you can zoom in to see a spectator's lapel pin at the Australian Open.

"It makes you feel like you're there, and I think that's the most important thing about this idea of virtual reality or immersive content," Bloom adds. "All of our photographers are now doing this, so that is news, sports, entertainment. If you want to make sure your audience has the front row at the Oscars in LA, we can actually give that to you, which is pretty astounding. We actually can transport people there that would never, ever have that opportunity. We give them that access."

Access is also enabled by partnerships, with which the VR industry is teeming. It appears this is the best way to keep up with the frontrunners in this tech.

"What was interesting was Oculus Rift was our first partnership and we felt really honoured and grateful to work with them, because they were the technology leader. And that is not exclusive; we are working with a number of different partners," says Bloom.

"Right now we're working with Google and their expeditions program, which is actually about bringing this experience into classrooms, so this is like a really wonderful application of this technology, and it's really about: how do you teach kids about the world by actually immersing them in it? And so we're really proud to be a partner with them on that and we are working with a number of different companies and outlets on some other interesting things, about which we'll have more announcements later on in the year, but we're expanding that out into different areas."

One of those areas is VR video, which Bloom defines as a "very different animal; you have to think about how people are experiencing that and moving through that area, just from a physicality standpoint, but also how do you tell the story in an effective way, because the story changes depending on what you're looking at".

"I think there's going to be a lot of new announcements in the coming year that will influence that, and the beauty of having a VR group is really about being a part of that conversation," she adds.

“Because VR is a fully immersive environment, you’ve got 100% of that person’s attention... but there has to be value delivered.”

– Bart Jenniches, Google Australia

The headsets and platforms

One company obviously deep in conversation is Google. With five million Google Cardboard units now distributed, Bart Jenniches, Google Australia's director of media and entertainment, CPG and automotive says Google's philosophy is to make these products available to everyone. It hasn't gone unnoticed. Bloom explains that part of the reason Getty Images is formalising the Virtual Reality Group is due to technology on the consumer end changing and being democratised.

It's fair to assume Facebook's US\$2 billion acquisition of Oculus in 2014 gave fair insight to the future potential of the market. Subsequent releases of into the Oculus Rift and Samsung Gear VR has paved the way in low-to mid-range headsets, where earlier this year, over one million people worldwide used Gear VR in just one month.

It's a win-win for Oculus with Samsung using its software platform as well, "simply because they have the strongest platform available out there," says Newton. "They see eye to eye in terms of our direction, and they have the inside running in terms of where the social platforms are taking it – the likes of Facebook. And there is a significant amount of desire from the Facebook team to drive VR into their social platforms as well, which is great and we think quite powerful, but Oculus will be the central hub of content, and we'll post all of our content onto there."

It seems that this won't be an exclusive arrangement, however, with Google's platform, Daydream, only announced at Google I/O in May 2016. The announcement was made by Clay Bavor, Google's head of VR – incidentally a new position and team announced in January of this year. Newton says of Daydream, "I don't think they'll be a competitor. They're still in developer mode; we're talking to all of the platforms, and Google's one of our strongest partners. Obviously, we run an Android platform on the phone. However, from what we can see so far, the most robust platform that exists today is the Oculus platform." Adding to the complexity of the partnerships in this space, Google is also releasing a viewer and controller under the Daydream banner.

In October 2016, after dipping its toe with Cardboard and liking how the water felt, Google dove in with its Daydream View headset to accompany its new own-brand phone, Pixel.

So is this a race to the moon? With announcements hitting the media faster than you can put on a headset, it seems companies who rest on their laurels will be quickly left behind. And it is not just about upgrades. There is still potential to be the first and patented products by companies such as Apple, which has been tight-lipped to this point, lets us know that there are big things still to come.

Newton says, "The hardware can take on myriad different forms, so right now we're using the power of the phone and the quality of the hardware that resides

THE HARDWARE



Cardboard: Google's idea for cheap, accessible headsets that work with any phone and can be branded through.



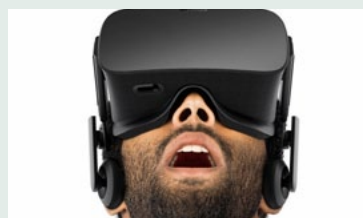
Daydream View: Google's headset that works with Daydream-enabled phones, such as the co-released Pixel phone.



Samsung Gear VR: Samsung's headset that works with Samsung phones.



HTC Vive: HTC's standalone headset and peripherals. Doesn't need a separate phone to be inserted.



Oculus Rift: the Facebook-owned technology company partnered with Microsoft for the launch of its consumer edition, which came with a wireless Xbox One controller and Xbox One games in the headset.

Industries to watch

Workplace health and safety. Look out! There's an articulated dump truck right behind you! Mining and construction is already using VR to provide more effective training in identifying potential hazards.

Medical. 3D mapping is assisting surgeons to successfully plan delicate organ operations. Also, Samsung is exploring relaxation treatment during chemotherapy.

Education. Accessibility to products like Google Cardboard is key in supporting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects through visual interactive learning.

in it – and we're not just talking about processing power, but the quality of the screen. There's nothing out there that comes close to it when you're talking VR, but there's nothing to say that we can't develop the same technology that's built into a headset itself. It just depends on what we want to try and do. Will it be a race? Yes, I think it'll be driven by the consumer, which is generally the case in these things, but also certain verticals, so there may be vertical markets that require an even higher definition or greater accuracy – things like the medical industry, particularly. You've got high-risk operations and that sort of thing. It is very much consumer-based. Will it continue to evolve? Absolutely."

This evolution will no doubt encompass augmented reality into which companies like Microsoft with HoloLens, among others, has stepped, but as yet the price (circa \$3000) is keeping this from the mass consumer. It's worth keeping an eye on these advanced products though, as the ideas will be incorporated into the popularised versions before we know it.

This innovation will no doubt be driven by the mass market, but Newton presumes a significant number of niche markets are also driving different types of VR technology, such as integration into other technology that "allows someone to manipulate an operation, for example, but the mass market is where the development will come," he says.

"Consumers will make their own decisions about what they do and don't like. The feedback that we're getting at the moment on the Gear VR is that it's astounding people and that's obviously a good place to start. We're working with a lot of those early adopters now to understand some of the pain points and some of the passion points around the product, so we can feed that back to R&D, which obviously works on the next generation of product. I know that we've obviously got a couple of new additions coming later this year that have all been driven out of consumer feedback so, I guess, watch this space."

“Virtual reality pulls experiences into very decentralised locations. That has a lot of disruptive flavour to it.”

– Scott Anthony, Innosight

Industry winners

It's unanimous that when it comes to VR, the biggest industry winners (besides gaming) are medical, education, tourism and real estate. It seems though that this disruptive tech is universally applicable to any industry, but does that necessarily mean that everyone should be doing it?

Newton says that although it depends on what your aims are, "I can assure you that we are overwhelmed to the point where we almost have too many industries coming to us with concepts and ideas for what they want to do with VR."

“ It’s fair to assume Facebook’s US\$2 billion acquisition of Oculus in 2014 gave fair insight into the future potential of the market. ”

Google's Bart Jenniches suggests a 'walk, run, transform' framework. "Testing the waters at this stage with the 360 video is such a beautiful experience for any brand that wants to tell a story, but still reach a large audience. That's where we're seeing the bulk of our advertisers experimenting and, again, leveraging their assets that they already have. Optus and the cricket did a 360 execution with us – and that's across every industry.

"Budget Direct brought one of their characters to life through a 360 execution. I think that's the starting point and then, because Cardboard is such a low-cost addition to that, brands that do want to add depth to that storytelling could work with Google on bringing that to life via Cardboard distribution, but then there are always going to be relevant brands that want to jump directly into the full VR experience. But with that comes a cost with

Improvements To Come

- reducing motion sickness,
- smaller and lighter head-mounted displays (HMD),
- all-in-one HMD – no phones, no cords, and
- augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR/hybrid reality).

Adding to the clutter?

"I don't think it adds to the clutter. I think because it's so new people are very curious about it, and I think what we'll see is, again, like Facebook has integrated it into its platform. I think it's going to be a much more seamless approach because it's not necessarily a new channel, it's just another tool within the channels that exist."

– Monica Bloom, Getty Images

"If you're telling a great story, or you're providing an incredible amount of utility, just like in your basic advertising – if you can provide value to that customer that's unique, that's where the brands are going to be that cut through. I mean, it's just something that traditional media can't offer."

– Bart Jenniches, Google Australia.

developing apps, a cost with developing the experience, and then just realising that the addressable audience is much smaller than what we have today with the existing technology."

Developing content means time and money. Of course, there are ways to enable self-development of apps and to gather understanding of how accessible the technology is for marketers. Kathryn Parsons is co-founder and CEO of successful UK start-up Decoded, a technology education company with offices in London, New York, Amsterdam and Sydney. With a mission to demystify technology and empower the people, Parsons has led the charge to successfully include coding on UK's national curriculum. She says, "VR is going to transform so many different industries and we can't quite imagine how or why, but I suppose what we really want to do is paint a picture for people."

Chris Monk, Decoded's head of region, is working on a new course to enable non-specialists to build virtual reality environments using the game development software, Unity. He is hoping it will bring home the speed – just a few hours – in which these experiences can be created.

Parsons sees huge potential for VR in the marketing space and has raised some interesting possibilities. "If you were running an airline or a travel company, could you start selling, at the same cost of a holiday, experiences that transport people to magical destinations and islands and places that they could never have dreamed of visiting? Would those experiences be real enough that it goes beyond being a campaign for the real

life experience? It is itself a valuable, valid product.” A recent visit to LA has given Parsons insight into the opportunity available for content. “There’s quite an exciting start-up community around virtual reality coming out of Hollywood. Scriptwriters are having to learn a whole new art form and what’s interesting is they’re soaking it up; they’re getting involved. These are the new storytellers. They’re a whole medium. This is as dramatic as the invention of cinema, frankly.”

Google’s Bart Jenniches agrees storytelling in VR will be a new frontier. “I do believe it will create new techniques and allow, especially, creatives in agencies and production houses to learn how to tell stories from a different view, with the consumer at the centre.”

Parsons sums it up well when asked which industry will benefit the most. “It’s so new, no one knows. That’s why this is going to be so much fun for creative people and creative minds.”

Those creative minds include Brisbane advertising agency BCM, which led the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in an early VR foray with ‘QUT Global Goggles’ launched at the July 2015 Open Day. Kevin Moreland, BCM’s managing director, explains that this was not just a first for QUT. “Virtual reality is something that was on our radar, and we wanted to bring it to a client – to the appropriate client.”

This was determined by several factors. BCM has had a long relationship with QUT and that established trust was needed to be able to say they had never done this before. The defining factor was the target audience – a discerning cohort of people under the age of 20 with a very high expectation of what their communication will deliver, including novelty and experience.

Moreland admits that, in today’s marketing environment, engagement is just as important as reach, where 20,000 branded Cardboard headsets were given out during the campaign. “What was really interesting about this particular exercise was our ad went on to tell us that people were watching and then rewatching. Five minutes of brand impact among a Gen Y and Gen Z audience is very difficult to achieve.”

With low ROI on campaigns a real possibility this early in the piece, there are different schools of thought on whether brands should be jumping in or spectating from the front row.

Moreland says, “Being early to anything is often when it’s at its most expensive, so you have to make a

Education And Journalism

“If you are at the centrepiece of a very moving story – I’m hoping that people will get a better understanding of that experience and develop that empathy for the situation. With Cardboard and Google Expeditions, Google has had more than a million students experience faraway places that just don’t come alive through a textbook.”

– Bart Jenniches, Google Australia.

determination about does that early move or advantage give you some additional mileage beyond a pure ROI?”

He adds, “I don’t think that you’ll be interested in people who do virtual reality in two years’ time, so there’s added value in terms of the weight the brand can leverage by being first to the party. That’s got to be accounted for in some way, shape or form. If you want to be first, and you may value that or you may not, but that should be considered. We live in a world, particularly among Gen Y and Gen Z, where they have an expectation of new things; if we’ve got Gen Y engaged for five minutes, what is that worth compared to having them engaged for a tweet, when they might follow anywhere from 20 to 2000 people? Are you even really remembered? I think that’s worth something.” ▲

“Is this a race to the moon? With announcements hitting the media faster than you can put on a headset, it seems companies who rest on their laurels will be quickly left behind.”

A woman is shown from the waist up, wearing a VR headset and holding a controller. She is standing in a room with large windows in the background. The image has a warm, orange-toned overlay. The text "Brain Trust" is centered over the image.

Brain Trust

ANSWERING:

“What have been your key learnings in creating virtual reality content that delivers value to the audience?”



Joel Beath

**Head of content at
Loud & Clear**

As VR is relatively new, there are common technical obstacles that need to be overcome – most commonly with cost, accessibility and implementation. It's important to identify and remove any obstacles during the planning phase.

We recently had an event where we were delivering a VR campaign to over 300 attendees simultaneously. To overcome the cost and accessibility barrier we used Google Cardboard. This allowed the user to turn their smartphone into a VR headset.

The idea of 300 people downloading an app on their smartphone was

abhorrent, so we created a browser-based VR experience. VR gives us the chance to experience something from the inside out rather than the outside in. There is a delight in VR tech that can't be replicated on any other medium. We've seen cardboard taken home, and tracked analytics to see it being shared with family, friends and colleagues. Humans want to share experiences; something like cardboard allows them to.

Don't lose sight of the purpose of the story by getting caught up in the technology – the 'wow' factor will wear off eventually and they will be left with an empty virtual roller coaster unless we tell stories.

We can get lost in the tech and not think about how foreign it is to users. It's important that participants understand what the objectives are, why you have chosen them, why their story is important, how it will be viewed.

Due to the fact that it is highly immersive, it provides a great opportunity to escape the noise. In a controlled environment, it's personal, intimate and captivating.

As much thought needs to go into creating a safe physical environment for the audience to partake as the content they consume. If you want true immersion, then you need to eradicate the 'real world' obstacle

It's a worthwhile investment if you have your audience advocating your content to their networks.

There's no reason why the audience can't be 100% connected to your content. This is where VR beats any other media and is, in fact, its USP (unique selling point). Unfortunately, there's no frequency with VR as it's a one-time experience; therefore, you need to have collection channels implemented to be able to action the experience and emotion immediately. With TVCs, Facebook ads etc, it's a pretty straightforward approach.

The more contact the audience has with your message, the more impact. With VR, it's maximum impact in one hit. You need to be able to action that emotion on the spot, or ensure you have the user data required to facilitate frequency with ongoing ads.



David Francis

**Head of sales APAC at
Zappar**

Undoubtedly, virtual reality is a brand new content platform that is unlike any other. Even if you simply looked at the global trend among leading creators of VR, to use theatre-makers rather than traditional filmmakers, it can be seen that this medium intrinsically requires a skill set of advanced interspatial understanding and ultimately a kind of new and flipped creative perspective.

When we started out in the virtual reality space, probably the biggest learning curve was to completely separate ourselves from traditional multimedia storytelling, and to avoid

shoehorning existing stories into the 360-degree space. Stories must be written for 360. They must be written for gestural interface and 1.4-square metre (15-square foot) depth tracking, if you are going to use an HTC Vive as your primary user HMD (head-mounted display), for example. Virtual reality, and in fact augmented reality, requires creatives to have a deep understanding and significant experience of the technology in order to create for it.

Imagine if your copywriters didn't understand the process of making a TVC. Imagine if they had only ever seen one or two TVCs. That is the current state of the virtual reality industry in Australia, right now. Brands are financing a lot of on-the-fly education,

usually at great expense.

Aside from ground-up, purpose-built creative, some of the peripheral user experience (UX) learnings are:

- **Allow the user time to settle in.** It takes time for someone to understand 360-degree content. Don't start the 'virtual roller coaster' until they can get their bearings.
- **Understand nausea.** 70% of women, for example, experience nausea in VR. Know the ins and outs of avoiding sudden edits, camera tilts and moving the user through the virtual space too fast.
- **Guide the user's point of interest.** Use the story and the players to make sure you soon lock in a certain direction.
- **Do not turn virtual reality into a sales-y commercial.** Native content works best.

There is so much to learn in this space, but I hope these help just a little bit. Ultimately, work with experts, and learn from their mistakes and hard-won experience.



**Bronwyn van
der Merwe**
**Managing director at
Fjord Australia**

Not so long ago, Virtual Reality (VR) was clunky and expensive, with limited use outside of military flight simulators. Today, however, the opportunities for VR are endless. VR provides an excellent avenue for brands – not just to market their products, but also to create unprecedented experiences for their customers, partners and employees.

While there is still much to learn from a VR branding and design perspective, our trials and experimentation to date have revealed a number of key learnings for brands:

- **VR is best consumed in short bursts** – generally under three minutes. Our experience has shown a clear limit in regards to how long adults can handle VR experiences physiologically. This is, of course, coupled with the discomfort of wearing huge headsets for extended periods of time.
- **VR allows us to explore a 360-degree space** so it's best suited to scenes that are truly immersive and graphically complex, such as

architectural fly-throughs, natural spaces, arenas and crowds. There are a few tourism organisations that are doing this well. Destination BC created the Wild Within VR Experience a couple of years ago, which allowed those planning a vacation to immerse themselves in the wilderness of British Columbia. This tantalised potential travellers with wide open spaces and a 360 look at the surrounding beauty of British Columbia.

- **It's important to explore dimensions** - the ability to navigate around 3D structures also provides huge potential for audience engagement in areas where we need to visually interrogate data structures and relationships. Thinking of areas like data visualisation and medical imaging, this will be incredibly useful.

While VR will certainly continue to become more mainstream, despite initial predictions, it may not actually be 'the next biggest thing' in the technology revolution. ▲

A person is shown from the chest up, wearing a white VR headset with black straps and a black controller in their right hand. They are looking towards the left. The background is a blurred indoor setting. A semi-transparent teal overlay covers the entire image.

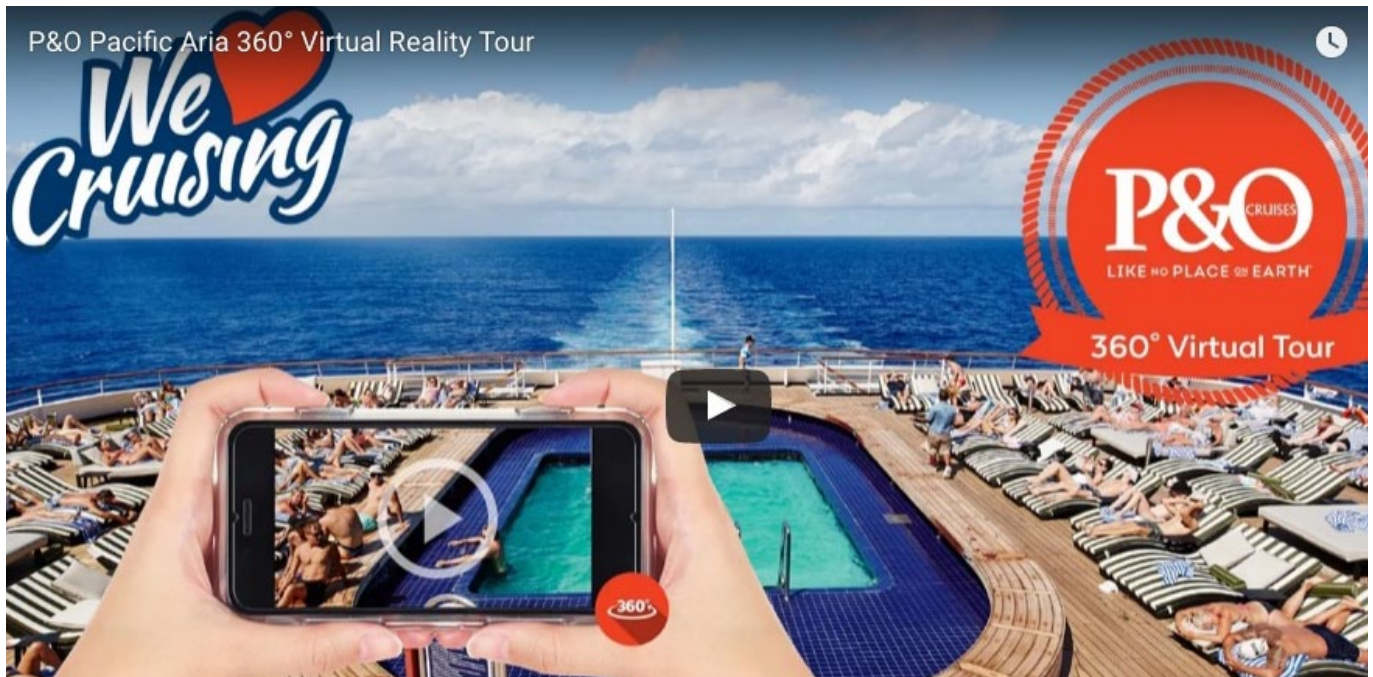
Creative Showcase

“ Perhaps the most transformative new creative technology since the internet. In the short term virtual reality is over-hyped, but in the longer term it is under-hyped. ”
– Kevin Kelly co-founder of Wired.



Aqualand

To promote its boutique development, property developer Aqualand implemented a VR campaign using the HTC Vive in the sales office of the property. Through room-scale VR and motion input, prospective buyers are able to walk through their potential new home, travel from the living room to the balcony and even touch the appliances in the kitchen thanks to the HTC Vive hand controls.



Cruisabou

To engage with 1.2 millions of commuters over 10 weeks, Cruisabou used seat-back media on trains and buses to give people the chance to experience virtual cruising aboard three ships via their mobile phones. More than 200,000 minutes of the four three-minute 360-videos were watched, resulting in a 40% uplift in web traffic and 67% increase in time on site. www.cruiseabout.com.au/virtual-reality



Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade

Serbia can now claim to have hosted the largest virtual contemporary art exhibition ever. Through use of augmented reality technology and special app called msu ARt, passers-bys could scan commercial ads and billboards in 15 cities, which then turned into artwork. The exhibition by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade and McCann Belgrade was part of ongoing efforts to shed the exclusivity image of art museums. Partnerships with brands and companies such as Coca-Cola Company, Delhaize, Telekom and Halkbank and a number of news outlets made it possible to use about 950 ad spaces as app triggers. www.youtube.com/watch?v=SY5pVQNPfsl



Unitec

We created an interactive virtual reality experience to launch Unitec's new 'Think. Do' campaign to the market. Participants were 'teleported' into three immersive curriculums offered at Unitec versus a traditional lecture environment. We also used a Brainlink device to track engagement levels by measuring people's brainwaves to show how much more engaged they were learning via interacting rather than just passively watching a lecture. unitec.ac.nz/why-choose-unitec/the-thinkdo-way

QUT

Queensland University of Technology (QUT), has wowed students at its 2015 Open Day with the launch of 'QUT Global Goggles', an immersive Virtual Reality (VR) experience, using Google Cardboard. Open Day visitors were able to experience a unique 360-degree view of the Brisbane skyline with the addition of some unexpected international landmarks, and keep their own complimentary 'takeaway' Google Cardboard VR headset. They simply downloaded and viewed the free QUT Global Goggles app from the App Store or Google Play to activate their VR experience.

youtube.com/watch?v=b0Izo8xDhPg





Standard Chartered

Standard Chartered Bank's biggest markets are in Asia, but its biggest sponsorship is a football club in the north-west of England. When 99% of your audience will never get the chance to attend a game, what do you do? Innovative technology and immersive storytelling allowed the bank to not just overcome this barrier, but to use the remoteness of Liverpool Football Club (LFC) fans from their beloved club's home as a strength. The 'Inside Anfield' virtual experience, that was shot using 360-degree cameras, and LFC ambassador Robbie Fowler and legend John Barnes feature, taking fans with them on the Anfield journey. www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTKLXQwfYfg



McDonald's Australia

For the 2016 version of its biggest annual promotion, *Monopoly*, Macca's launched an app that featured three augmented reality game mechanics. 'Tap to Play' sees game cards fly into the real world via the phone's camera and augmented reality before letting players choose a card to 'Tap' for the chance to win. 'Spin to Win' brings a more physical challenge to life where players spin the card in the hope of uncovering prizes. And 'Dice Roll' challenges players to roll a perfect combination to land on prizes on the virtual *Monopoly* game board.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AprJpOSCiA



Spirit of Anzac

The Spirit of Anzac Centenary Experience was a partnership between the Australian Government, Australian War Memorial and Department of Defence, and supported by Commonwealth Bank and Telstra. The experience was an immersive gallery focusing on Australia's experience in the First World War, which spent two years travelling to 23 locations around Australia. Visitors could interact with displays through an augmented reality app, and the experience was extended to audiences that couldn't get to one of the locations by a dedicated website that included a 360-degree virtual tour and teaching materials for schools. www.spiritofanzac.gov.au



Jaguar

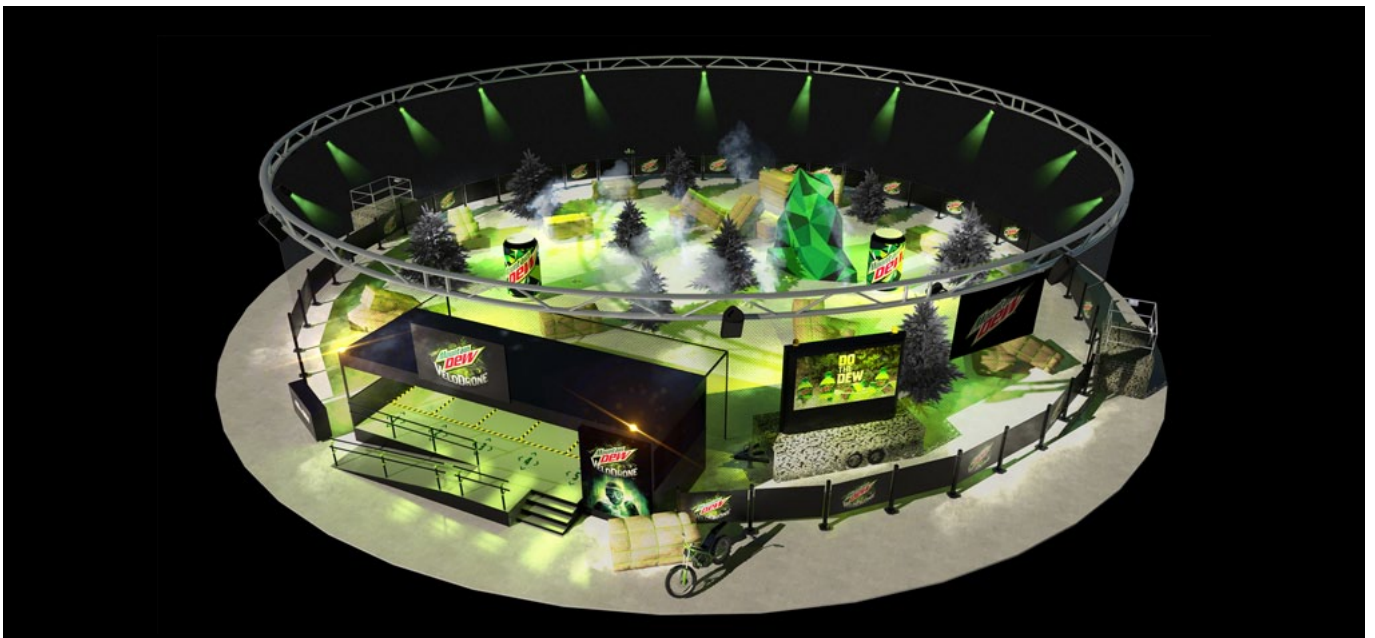
Jaguar invited people to experience the only virtual reality simulation worthy of the F-TYPE: one that turned out to be not-so-virtual. Jaguar and its agency Y&R New Zealand won a gold, two silvers and a bronze at the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity with this stunt. Visitors to the Big Boys Toys expo were promised a next-level VR experience in a Jaguar F-TYPE on, what looked like, a large motion simulator platform. A fake VR helmet played a distraction video while the car was secretly lowered and driven on to the adjacent arena by a precision driver. Hidden cameras inside the passengers' helmets went live and they were taken on an adrenaline-pumping ride before being obviously returned to the stand.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zpx0Eb1Tvo



Budget Direct

Budget Direct worked with 303 MullenLowe and Altfx to create a 'virtual reality public participation advert'. The 360-degree film launched during an integration with Seven Network's Fast 4 Tennis when Captain Risky appeared live alongside tennis stars like Lleyton Hewitt and Nick Kyrgios. A competition was integrated into the broadcast where people were directed to find a hidden entry code buried within the VR spot, giving them the chance to win one of 1100 Google Cardboards. www.youtube.com/watch?v=OakykRslnvE



Mountain Dew

A first-of-its-kind 'Velodrone' was a cataclysm of lightning fast drone racing and hair-raising laser siege. For Mountain Dew's activation at EB World, teams of five Drone Hunters faced off against the country's most deft and skilled Drone Pilots. Pilots raced around the Mountain Dew Velodrone playing field consisting of mountains and trees. The Drone Hunters fired at the racing drones as they flew past, using a special laser glove. The Velodrone was created to support Mountain Dew's national 'Drone Hunting' campaign, in which the globally-led creative features a group of motocross riders chasing down and catching drones in a net. www.youtube.com/watch?v=zryW3mGUsa0



McDonald's UK

As part of its 'Follow Our Foodsteps' campaign to champion British and Irish farming, McDonald's UK invited consumers to go behind the scenes of its supply chain through several executions utilising Samsung Gear VR technology. 'Top of the Crop' allowed players to drive a virtual potato-harvesting tractor, scoring points for speed and accuracy. Immersive videos took viewers behind the scenes of an organic dairy farm, a free-range chicken farm and beef-processing facilities in England. Another immersive film allowed viewers to see what a day in the life of a restaurant worker is like as they take and prepare orders for customers. Finally, 'Guess My Job' presented a range of food and farming skills challenges in collaboration with agricultural university Harper Adams, the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board and McCain Foods UK. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dplx9TaYvE



Best Western

As part of Best Western Hotels & Resorts' brand refresh, the company is providing guests with an immersive 360-degree look into its hotel offerings. Through use of the Best Western Virtual Reality Experience (BWVRE), travellers are able to view guest rooms, hotel lobbies and amenities prior to arriving at a property. Best Western partnered with Google Street View in a three-year process to gather 1.7 million photos of its 2200 North American hotels. Using Google Street View Technology along with customised narration and music, BWVRE creates an engaging, story-telling experience and sets a new industry standard for virtual reality. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HftC6eaVjto



Stella Artois

'The Perfect Flight' is an Oculus and Google Cardboard 4D VR experience that lets users become Rufus the Hawk, Wimbledon's official pigeon scarer. They immerse themselves in the experience using the Oculus headset and noise-cancelling headphones, all while they are harnessed onto a custom-built surface that rotates from side to side. The user is surrounded by five fans, which simulate wind and make the experience even more immersive. Agencies Unit9 and Mother helped Stella Artois to attract as many Londoners as possible by setting up a four-day installation in Waterloo Station on the first day of the Championships. vimeo.com/133058041



Tourism Board of British Columbia

Destination BC became the first destination marketing organisation in North America to use virtual reality when it launched *The Wild Within VR Experience*, using Oculus Rift technology. *The Wild Within VR Experience* is an interactive, three-dimensional video that allows travellers to experience British Columbia in a truly immersive way, as if they were actually there. Destination BC featured *The Wild Within VR Experience* at travel trade and media marketplaces globally, giving key travel influencers and travellers the opportunity to experience British Columbia in a new way. As headsets become readily available in 2015, *The Wild Within VR Experience* will be available online through Destination BC's website, HelloBC.com, and at select consumer events. www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SkHdRvPbv4



Absolut

Absolut Labs launched an interactive virtual reality gaming experience created in collaboration with world renowned electronic musician deadmau5, which invites fans to join the artist on an epic night out in his own virtual world. As the latest venture from Absolut Labs, the brand's nightlife think tank and idea incubator, Absolut deadmau5 is part of the brand's ongoing mission to redefine and reimagine nightlife through its Absolut Nights campaign. Connecting people in new and unexpected ways – both in the real world and, now, the virtual world – is in the DNA of the Absolut Nights campaign, creating nights that memories are made of. www.youtube.com/watch?v=TE8v9UNDgdl



CommBank

As part of its Start Smart financial education program, which teaches children the principles of money management, CommBank has launched 'The Teleporter Adventures', a campaign comprising a children's storybook called *Sammy the Space Koala*, written by award-winning Australian children's author, Ursula Dubosarsky, and a virtual reality headset, called The Teleporter. The storybook and Teleporter headset have been designed to work together and feature content adapted from Start Smart's Year 1 and 2 school programs to provide an interactive, educational experience that reinforces the difference between a 'need' and a 'want'. The concept was devised and created by M&C Saatchi in Australia, with education professionals, gaming designers and a paediatrician all consulted for their respective input.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8P9pVg7f1I



Disney Junior

Over one weekend, Disney Junior brought a little magic to a busy bus stop in Asia, turning an ordinary day into an extraordinary one for some unsuspecting families. The fun Bus Shelter activation was part of the 'Disney Junior Magical Moments' campaign, and footage from the event rolled out across Disney's online and social channels. The video captures the surprise and delight of families and little ones as they pass by a converted bus shelter and are transported into the magical world of Disney Junior, appearing alongside their favourite characters from Mickey Mouse to Miles from Tomorrowland. www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyMqAOalHU8



Viewpoints

**Opinion, analysis and learnings from
a diverse range of perspectives.**

A VR production agency's guide to thinking about VR content

Landon Curry writes that a good VR campaign will trigger an emotional response for the user and get them talking about their experience.

If you're thinking about creating VR content for your brand, stop and think about why. Why do you want to tell your story through virtual reality? Will you be able to utilise all the unique benefits of the medium to ensure engagement and excitement exudes to the consumer?

At Red Cartel, we're catering to a wide variety of briefs from ad agencies and brands directly from different industries. Some have a clear idea of what they want to do and some are brand new to VR and need us to guide them through.

Until clients try a true interactive VR experience for themselves it's hard to convey just how immersive and engaging the medium actually is. There is always a 'wow' moment for clients when they realise the possibilities and how it can radically change the industry they are in.

We are also trying not to take this wow factor for granted and urge our clients to contemplate how engaging their idea really is by not trying to imitate traditional 2D ideas in a 3D platform, but rather reinventing their ideas specifically for the virtual platform.

Many times hesitant clients will approach us unsure of how their ideas will ultimately translate into VR, or even if VR is the desired medium for what they are trying to

Landon Curry is managing director at Red Cartel, a VR production company based in Sydney with over 17 years' experience servicing the advertising and gaming industries.

achieve. Some things definitely work better than others in a VR platform.

An example of this is online shopping. We recently developed the world's first 'Virtual Department Store' for eBay and Myer. Imagine having access to hundreds and thousands of products in front of you, no matter where you are in the world.

If you're looking to tell your next story with virtual reality, here are a few things to keep in mind that will ensure the end result

resonates with and excites your customers.

The first tip would be to try a variety of VR devices and experiences to draw inspiration from. Clients may have seen a simple VR experience (like a flat 360 video) or watched a YouTube video with people trying the HTC Vive or the Oculus Rift. However, to fully understand what this technology is capable of, they need to experience high quality immersive VR firsthand.

Equipment quick guide

Google Cardboard: The entry level and also the most cost-effective in terms of deployment. Cardboard headsets can be produced for as little as \$12 each including branding (if ordered in bulk). These devices have basic lenses and will work with both Apple and Android devices. Interaction can be achieved either by holding your gaze over an object/area, which can trigger an event; alternatively there is a button on the top of the headset that acts as a tap interaction.

Samsung Gear VR: The next level up from Google Cardboard, this works with a variety of the higher-end Samsung devices and is the highest quality portable device currently available. The Gear VR provides a very smooth and immersive experience.

HTC Vive: Currently the most immersive device available as it provides room scale tracking with interaction via hand controllers. The Oculus Rift provides a similar experience; however, currently there are no hand controllers for the Rift.

Another key factor to consider is who your target audience is; this will play a key role in choosing the right VR technology to suit your needs.

For example, if you are trying to reach as many people as possible you would aim for Google Cardboard, as it is also the most cost-effective in terms of deployment, but has the lowest level of immersion.

The Samsung Gear VR is the next step up and has a much higher level of immersion. And, finally, if you're inviting hundreds of people to experience the content, there are the room scale devices like Oculus Rift and HTC Vive.

These devices offer the highest level of immersion, as they can track your head and hand movement. All these devices and experiences can cater for single users or multiple users in the same environment.

Virtual environments and experiences are not

“ A good VR campaign will trigger an emotional response for the user and get them talking about their experience with their friends. ”

constrained by traditional 2D marketing and advertising methods. You can immerse your clients in any environment you can dream up. Adding interactivity to objects inside a VR environment also enhances the VR experience and engages users.

A good VR campaign will trigger an emotional response for the user and get them talking about their experience with their friends.

Five key criteria to keep in mind

- 1. Utilise VR for the full immersion it can provide.** It is not like putting together a standard marketing campaign or an application/game for an app store. Interface design should also have depth and interactivity to fully utilise the medium of VR.
- 2. Avoid motion sickness.** Moving the user without them controlling the motion can cause varying degrees of sickness. This generally occurs with fast motion when the user is close to other objects. Ideally, you want your users to control the movement themselves with a device like the HTC Vive. If you need to move through a large area, using a teleport system can be a good solution. Lower frame rates can also lead to the sensation of motion sickness; applications should be optimised to run at 90 frames per second to avoid this sensation.
- 3. Who is your target audience?** Who are you trying to reach? Clients should identify for which platform they would like their content developed. Consider portable devices such as the Gear VR or Google Cardboard to gain maximum reach. Alternatively, consider the HTC Vive if you are setting up a fixed installation (shopping centre, innovation lab, showroom, trade show etc) as the HTC Vive offers room scale immersion, which can't be achieved on the portable devices (yet).
- 4. The user can see everything.** While before it made sense to focus detail on what the user could see onscreen through the virtual camera, users now have total freedom of movement and can even go through walls. This increases the difficulty when creating the environment and planning performance, but must be taken into account.
- 5. Single user or multi user.** Having a friend or family member share a VR experience with you adds another layer of immersion to any experience. This also works with salespeople as they can be inside the environment with you, pointing out features, moving objects, changing options etc. This works particularly well for industries where collaboration is beneficial, such as property development where a salesperson can be on the other side of the world showing a family through a virtual property. ▲

“ Having a friend or family member share a VR experience with you adds another layer of immersion to any experience. This also works with salespeople as they can be inside the environment with you, pointing out features, moving objects, changing options etc. ”

We've been given a gift. Let's not f**k it up.

Cameron Farrelly spent a weekend watching 32 different VR films through a swivel chair and a top-notch headset to bring you his expert opinion.

When the digital video revolution landed in our laps it gave brands a clever new way to connect with humans and build lasting relationships. Many met the challenge by making content that outperformed traditional media and redefined the share button – whether it was a dude jumping from outer space or a *Footloose* flash mob in the Philippines.

But for every branded content win, there was a flurry of flimsy filler to follow. Essentially, agencies got horny and too many made a mess of it. Selling long-form ads instead of original stories. Forcing commercial messages into entertainment formats. Finding a formula that resonated, then just repeating it. Stealing ideas from pop culture and putting an end frame on it. De-prioritising the audience's needs and putting the brand's first. Failing to recognise that, without that audience, branded content is no more powerful than a neglected banner ad, flashing away on a site that nobody visits. Our social streams fast became a video swampland: a dumping ground for CTAs that nobody wanted to answer.

When it hits the mark, it's exceptional. However, it's the failed missions that have dampened the appetite



**Cameron Farrelly
is executive creative
director at BRING**

for brands to play in a space ultimately made for entertainment. So, let's not f**k things up with VR. Let's think before we jump in and press all the buttons at once. We've been handed a beautiful gift here and it's up to each and every one of us to navigate the sacred axis where both the brand and the consumer win, with every film we make. If we can't promise that, we shouldn't bother.

Fresh from a 'research' weekend watching 32 different VR films in a swivel chair and via a top-notch headset, I've become a self-certified expert. As such, I've got some ideas on how we can best guide brands into this exciting new form of storytelling without ruining it for everyone.

Establish the role of the brand first

Make your intentions known. Be transparent while celebrating the blurred lines of (really good) advertising and entertainment.

Are you aligning the brand to a feeling? A set of values? An attitude? Or are you selling something? It's no secret that Millennials have heard, seen and experienced enough BS to know when something is insincere or misleading. So, if you're not upfront, you'll be booted from the team pretty quickly.

Be clever about how you integrate your brand. It's important that the viewer unplugs from the experience knowing who made it, but making your brand the hero of the conversation can be earned by more than just product placement or a watermark.

“ We've been handed a beautiful gift here and it's up to each and every one of us to navigate the sacred axis where both the brand and the consumer win. ”

Humanise the viewer

Make them central to the experience rather than an extra in the story. VR has the power of instantaneous immersion, so you need to design a character that the viewer can be consumed by. And it needs to happen within the first 3.5 seconds. It's important. How do other characters fit within the narrative and interact with the viewer? How can the viewer influence the outcome? Even if your VR experience is based upon the documentation of live action, you need to consider the role of the viewer within that film. VR can't fall into the trap of being a spectator sport. Otherwise you may as well be passively Periscoping from the side of stage.

Fire your production company

The VR division they launched last Thursday isn't going to give you your best shot at the title. Production teams built to capture 2D video are great at just that. But shooting in 360 is another ballgame altogether, and should be treated as such. Work with people who have done the hard yards with the technology. The ones that experimented, played and mastered their own approach to the craft. Work with people that want to collaborate on the idea rather than just work to a brief. This is an art in its absolute infancy that only a few have truly mastered.

You need a 'wow' moment

Like all entertainment, you need to stimulate the viewer's mind. Like Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes' rap in 'Waterfalls' or the elevator scene in *Drive*. It doesn't necessarily need to be all guns blazing or brain bending; there are subtle ways to hit the spot. All I am saying is that you need to give them a darn good reason for rigging themselves up and open to consume your brand experience. The ultimate barometer for success should be their 'fffwwoah' when they take the VR headset off.

“ Even if your VR experience is based upon the documentation of live action, you need to consider the role of the viewer within that film. VR can't fall into the trap of being a spectator sport. ”

Think small

If you don't get the tiny detail right, you're missing the point of the platform. One watch shouldn't be enough. The viewer should demand another go as soon as they finish their first. You should consider planting Easter eggs and dropping seeds of surprise via micro-narratives taking place in the opposite direction of the action. What is happening when the viewer looks straight up? People put on the headset with a bout of inquisitiveness, so you have to play up to that. They want to explore the environment. They want to see things the person before didn't pick up on. When it comes to 360, sometimes the most obvious POV placements are the least rewarding in terms of delivering an engaging perspective.

Play

You don't need to spank your entire Q1 budget on a feature film quality, scripted masterpiece. Devise a strategy that lets you explore the medium and have fun with it. Be courageous in your quests. Play with new ideas. Put cameras where cameras have never been before. Like I said, there are only a few who have mastered it currently, which leaves us a blank canvas to explore.

Start from scratch

Don't even think about repurposing your existing content. A TVC idea simply doesn't translate, so step away from the remote control. You need to approach the format with an imagination that can think in 360. Throughout the creative process you need be conscious of what is happening in every single direction. How are you occupying the space? How is the sound experience contributing to the story? Why are we even making this in VR? Don't fall into the trap of VR for VR's sake. This craft demands a new kind of thinker with a new perspective on how to tell a story like nobody has ever done before.

There's no slowing down the forces behind the VR movement. It's here to stay, yet in many ways it hasn't even truly begun. The best bit is that these are uncharted waters, loaded with creative potential. And, with so much to play for, it's a race to the top for brands, creators, film studios and dreamers. Will Red Bull win the first Academy Award for Excellence in Virtual Reality? Or is VR destined to become internet wallpaper?

Unlike the digital video revolution, brands aren't having to jump on at the last minute. With VR, Brandland is a starting player and certainly has what it takes to shift the dial, and now is our chance to prove it by setting the bar high and keeping it there. ▲

Can virtual reality create real empathy?

Allan Soutaris explores how not-for-profit organisations are using VR to build empathy.

Virtual reality (VR) is being hailed as ‘the ultimate empathy machine’, a new way to allow people living in the Western world to experience the bleak reality of life in developing nations.

Recently, the United Nations, the World Bank, Amnesty International and Charity: water have unveiled large VR projects. For those in the international development sector, it’s hard not to get caught up in the excitement and potential of this new technology.

Many not-for-profit agencies have turned to VR as a powerful source of fundraising. Amnesty International UK has reported a 16% increase in sign-ups to regular giving in street fundraising activities through VR. Similarly, one in six people who watched the incredible *Clouds over Sidra* film about a 12-year-old girl’s view of her home in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan donated to UNICEF.

But what makes a successful VR story and does it have the power to create real empathy?

In June this year, Plan International Australia hosted a Twitter forum with communication professionals from the humanitarian sector, virtual reality and wearable technology developers, documentary filmmakers, journalists and researchers to discuss the technology and its role in creating real empathy.

The technology is evolving so rapidly that, even since the event, a lot has changed.

While once seen as an emerging technology, VR is quickly finding its way into the hands and households of even the most casual tech consumer. Platforms such as Google Daydream, Samsung Gear VR, Sony PlayStation VR and Microsoft’s HoloLens are about to saturate the market. The entry point for VR is incredibly lower than it was six months ago.

It’s exciting to imagine where the technology will be in a year from now. It won’t be long before users will expect more than a simple 360-degree video experience once immersed in their headsets.

Before continuing any further, I’d like to make one thing clear: what most people consider VR is, in fact, 360-degree video.

This is important, especially as the technology moves forward ever so rapidly. Experiencing Google’s jaw dropping Tilt Brush, at Melbourne agency The Royals, highlighted to me the stark differences between 360



Allan Soutaris
is digital strategist
at Plan International
Australia.

video and true immersive VR. Games such as Sony’s *Resident Evil 7* and *Batman: Arkham* will expose the most casual technology users to fully immersive VR environments.

And I haven’t even touched on the exciting leaps in augmented and mixed reality.

But, for now, most humanitarian agencies are using the most basic form of the technology, which is 360-degree video.

But this doesn’t mean that this type of VR doesn’t solicit empathy. When well-produced the medium creates an unforgettable, often very emotional experience.

Some of the most immersive stories I’ve seen have been produced by news outlets *The New York Times* and *The Huffington Post*. Ryot, a Los Angeles company specialising in hopeful content from developing and disaster-affected nations, has produced 360 pieces of content for *The New York Times*, NPR, the Associated Press, *The Huffington Post* and Sierra Club.

This method, known as ‘immersive storytelling’, is an effective way of transporting ‘readers’ to richly immersive scenes. The lowering cost of 360 video production and distribution of cheap headsets such as Google Cardboard and a slew of Android OS handsets ensures quality journalism reaches audiences outside the traditional print market.

Given the growth of the medium within the old guard, and the implications it is having on pushing the technology mainstream, the question for not-for-profits is not ‘can we use this technology?’ but rather ‘how effectively can we tell stories and gather donations?’

For not-for-profit organisations, is just ‘being on VR’ enough? Does VR give storytellers the opportunity to change how the sector talks about development?

Here are the answers to some of those questions that emerged from the Plan Twitter chat from the not-for-profit sector in June.

How can aid organisations offer an immersive experience that creates real empathy instead of guilt?

At times 360 video can feel voyeuristic rather than empowering. Scenes of poverty and injustice are hard to look at, let alone experience. Guilt is sometimes used as a tactic in charity advertising. A part of the reason guilt exists is because traditional charity adverts are just that, a detached window into a scene that you have no control over. But immersive storytelling gives users the opportunity to look from the inside out rather than the outside in.

The virtue of VR is being able to lose the frame, leaving the user to frame the protagonist's world in their own way. Through this, we are reminded that the film's subjects are human. The platform has the power to invite audiences into the subject's home, not offer a view through their window. And that changes your emotional perception.

Notes on Blindness is a perfect example of losing the frame. The movie is an innovative project inspired by the audio diaries of John Hull, an author who recorded private musings upon losing his eyesight in the 1980s. The film is distributed in a traditional film format with an accompanying VR film that transports users to a new dimension.

Is it realistic to expect users to donate 'in the real world' after experiencing an immersive virtual experience?

Organisations such as Amnesty International and UNICEF have seen encouraging fundraising results on the back of 360-degree immersive experiences. It has been widely reported that when the VRSE film *Clouds Over Sidra* was shown at the 2015 Davos World Economic Forum, viewers removed their headsets in tears. The UN showed the film at fundraising events, claiming that it helped raise US\$3.8 billion from donors, even helping to spawn UN's own VR division.

The recently completed *The Price of Conflict, the Prospect of Peace* by the World Bank and Sydney studio S1T2, is seeing a "phenomenal response from a traditionally cynical audience".

Claims such as these and UNICEF's own claim that VR is more likely to inspire a passer-by on the street to give has prompted VR fever among not-for-profits, with a race not to be left behind.

But scepticism among some cohorts of the charity sector remains and, given 360 projects are still expensive, the question for smaller not-for-profit organisations is: does the promise of large donations

“What most people consider VR is, in fact, 360-degree video. This is important, especially as the technology moves forward ever so rapidly.”

warrant heavy investment into 360 projects as opposed to a delegate visit or 'field trip'?

There is debate between those who see investment in technology as an empathy/relationship building mechanism, best leveraged at a later stage for donations, and others who say a primed audience should be invited to give immediately after viewing a 360, perhaps even 'in film'.

Given people will soon be consuming VR content on devices with connected payment gateways (Android, PlayStation and Microsoft), I expect this feature to appear in the not too distant future.

In an age of information overload, does VR create a space where audiences are immersed in your word and message, or does it add to the noise?

Due to the platform's highly immersive nature, VR provides the great opportunity of escape. Putting on a headset feels like a unique opportunity to be captivated. It's personal and intimate, removing all distractions and noise – it is an escape.

Man on Spire by *The New York Times* – a breathtaking account of one man's climb up the World Trade Centre – is a fantastic example of immersive storytelling being able to completely remove all outside noise.

I challenged a handful of colleagues who are afraid of heights to watch the film.

It surprised me that even as my colleagues began to shake and squeal with fright, at no moment did they stop the experience. Afterwards I asked them why they didn't simply remove the headset upon becoming frightened.

Their answer? 'I felt like I was there. I didn't want to move in case I fell.'

As the entry point for VR becomes more widely accessible, it will remove the challenge of convincing people to commit the time to using VR as a communications tool. Very soon, the technology will be in the hands and households of most individuals.

But as VR continues to penetrate the market, just being on VR won't be enough – the experiences will need to expand beyond simply telling stories in the first person to become truly transformative. ▲

How to stay real in a virtual world

Sam Ramlu writes that it's important to go back to marketing basics and not be overwhelmed by the tech.

I'm sure we all know the numbers by now. VR is the billion-dollar industry everyone is talking about, expected to be worth over \$30 billion by 2020. That's \$30,000,000,000! Seems a bit low to me, actually. Clients and brands are snapping up VR as a new medium – but is it worth the hype? In the mad dash to do cool stuff in this incredible new medium, are brands at risk of losing their senses, so to speak, and forgetting to make genuine, relevant and memorable experiences? I believe it's worth the \$30 billion of hype, and brands can make a real and lasting impact with it. It just takes some digging and smart thinking.

Look at the landscape we're in. There's a lot here. Oculus, HTC Vive, Samsung Gear, Google Cardboard – these are just some of the more popular device names being thrown around when people talk about virtual reality. There are many more and even more in production as we speak. Then there are the experiences themselves: 360 video, photogrammetry, computer-generated graphics, light field. The list goes on.

If I haven't already lost you, thanks for sticking it out. That's probably about as technical as we'll get. The technology can be overwhelming, even to us who are embedded deep in the industry. Every day there's new hardware, new tools, new production insights and new opinion pieces. It's safe to say it all sounds fairly complicated.

First, let's completely forget the tech. Humour me, just for a minute.

Let's go back to marketing basics. Just like any new medium, we shouldn't forget the essentials of how to create a great experience.

Think about your brand, product or service. What are your objectives? What do you want to communicate to your audience? What story do you want to tell and what message do you want to get across? Are you giving context to your brand, sharing its history, showcasing a product or visualising its use? Do you want to educate or expand on features and benefits? Or are you simply going for brand awareness via entertainment?

Remember, it's not all about you. Think about your audience – your clients, your customers. Who are you talking to, what do they want to know and what are they genuinely interested in? How can you involve them in the



Sam Ramlu is managing director at New Zealand-based digital and technology agency Method. She's passionate about technology and how it can be used to engage a range of audiences, and she enjoys working with clients and businesses to help navigate the world of digital to bring their brands and stories to life.

experience? How can you offer them something fun, unique and interactive? How can you get them so excited that they want to share their experience with their peers? It should be exactly that, by the way – an experience.

This is where VR comes back in.

VR lets you experience real and imagined worlds as if you were really there. It's the closest we've come to teleportation. You now have the opportunity to truly immerse people in your brand like never before. The applications are endless.

Hand on heart – it is worth the hype. Every single person I've watched having a true virtual reality experience has been blown away, and I've personally presented to at least a few hundred of them. Young and old, early adopters to laggards – they've all had the same reaction. I'm not talking 360 video. There's only so far the novelty factor of that will get you. I'm talking about immersive experiences where

you give the user control and engage them with virtual worlds and environments.

This is where VR shines over every other medium before it. There is nothing else like it. (I'm repeating myself, but it warrants a second mention.)

Today, we're more visually overstimulated than ever before. Studies show the more stimulated we are, the harder it is to capture and retain our attention. VR is a personal experience.

You put the headset on and you're transported away from real life, from wherever you're standing (or sitting) to a whole new world. With headphones on, there's nothing

else distracting you. You're as immersed as you can be.

A recent survey by Greenlight VR with US customers aged 16 to 60 showed that 62% of consumers would feel engaged with a brand that sponsors a VR experience, and 53% are more likely to purchase from that brand.

So, how do you get the best out of VR and stay real, relevant and memorable? Below are some pointers. Armed with insights into your communication story and audience, think about how you can leverage these and create a VR experience to bring your message to life.

Be true to the medium

VR is much more than passively watching 360 video. Make the user feel in control, and you'll keep their attention long after the novelty of 360 dies off. Can you have them interact with your brand or navigate their own way? How can you give them control of the journey?

Tell a story, be engaging

VR can hold someone captive for long periods of time. Where else can you have someone dedicated to your brand experience for 10 to 15 minutes or more? The better your story, the more likely someone can get completely lost in it, and that's a good thing. Think about the visuals and script it out. Add narrative to give subtle clues to navigation and add depth and interest to the experience.

Make it fully immersive

Go beyond how it looks. Engage more of the user's senses. Use sound to bring the visuals to life. Can you add smell, touch, taste even? Remember to get the basics right first – sight and sound are your first touch points – and then add to the experience.

“ Stay close to your brand and give the viewer more than just a cool tech experience. They'll remember your brand, and how they felt when you took them traipsing through virtual reality in a way that was relevant to them.”

“ Let's go back to marketing basics. Just like any new medium, we shouldn't forget the essentials of how to create a great experience.”

Remember it's just another medium

It has to be promoted, shared and talked about. Think about how you're going to get your idea to your audience and make sure there's budget or resource to do this.

Use the appropriate device

Do you need high-end graphics and a rich, deep experience? If the answer's yes, the Oculus or HTC Vive are your best bets. Or do you want to make the most of space at an event and offer something less restricted without wires? The Samsung Gear is ideal if that's what you're going for. Finally, if you want to offer a takeaway, branded experience, with value add over time, consider an app for people to download on their own devices and a branded Google Cardboard to do the trick. Each device has their pros and cons. Consider these before you choose one over another.

Engage through education

Whether you are in the education and training field or not, never underestimate the power of teaching as a form of engagement. People are more likely to remember an experience that imparts something new.

Don't replace the experience

VR can take people where your product can't, but try not to replace the experience so they never need your product or service. You're enhancing rather than replacing, and teasing rather than giving the whole thing away. So, do the digging and the thinking. This amazing \$30 billion world is fantastic to be a part of, and you can do wonders for your brand when you keep it real for your audience. Wow them. Work the medium. Stay close to your brand and give the viewer more than just a cool tech experience. They'll remember your brand, and how they felt when you took them traipsing through virtual reality in a way that was relevant to them. That's where the real value of VR shines, and it's worth every penny. ▲

VR in the modern workplace

Ben Thompson explores how virtual reality will transform HR, internal marketing and the modern workplace.

Virtual reality (VR) has been getting substantial traction over the last two years, with big corporates investing into the R&D, recruiting personnel and growing the VR ecosystems to drive this new way of communicating stories. The platform is currently heavily focused on gaming and visual experiences, but we are already seeing much more practical applications of this new technology.

In the next five years, VR is going to transform every aspect of the workplace – from internal marketing by using VR for team building and employee training, to promoting your employer brand as innovative with VR meetings to create the office of the future.

Have you thought about using VR in your business yet? Or is it something you think you'll take notice of in a year or two? If you want to get ahead of the competition, it could pay to start thinking about it sooner rather than later.

Independent industry analyst Jeff Kagan says: "VR will start as a competitive advantage for early adopters. Then, over time, it will become the way we do things. At that time, companies who don't do it this new way will be behind the eight ball."

Here are a few ways that businesses will be implementing VR into their workplace.

VR training

VR training will take your employees' personal development to an entirely new level. You can offer them the chance to improve their negotiating skills and public speaking, as well as the way they interact with their colleagues.

“On the ‘virtual’ job training will allow employees to start work fully qualified and ready to perform from the very first day.”



Ben Thompson is CEO of Employment Hero, a provider of all-in-one software tools that transform the way employers manage HR and the entire employment life cycle.

The future will see employees play virtual reality games to perfect their job skills and experience in the real world. On the 'virtual' job training will allow employees to start work fully qualified and ready to perform from the very first day. And when that becomes commonplace, will your employees want to sit in a boring room to learn something ever again?

The key benefits of VR training will be significant, to say the least.

Here are just a few:

- **Reduced risk.** Training on potentially dangerous equipment will be made risk-free. Accidents can happen with no consequence in a VR environment. Why should pilots be the only people who get to play with advanced simulators?
- **Active, not passive training.** VR's immersive experience gets the trainee completely involved, with no distractions. There's no substitute for a hands-on approach, and this is exactly what VR can offer. Time and time again, in an identical environment.
- **Realistic scenarios.** As the quality of VR training develops, it will become virtually on a par with putting the trainee into a real-life situation.
- **Remote access.** Remote training can save on the time and costs involved in having staff travel to a central training location.
- **Complex ideas simplified.** An immersive, 360-degree VR training scenario will be a powerful tool in helping employees get to grips with complex subjects and concepts.
- **It's fun!** Good VR training is fun and enjoyable, and this results in higher levels of employee engagement and effort.

“There is a definite gap in the market for a major organisation to build a powerful VR team-building product.”

VR meetings

At Mobile World Congress this year, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg made a surprise appearance at the unveiling of Samsung's new 360-degree VR camera.

Zuckerberg spoke in glowing terms about the possibility of holding meetings in VR. “Imagine holding a group meeting or event anywhere in the world,” he said. “Right now, virtual reality is mostly used for games and entertainment, but that's quickly evolving. One day you'll be able to put on a headset that'll change the way you live, work and communicate.”

If the likes of Facebook are getting involved, the move to VR meetings looks set to happen sooner rather than later. It feels like a logical move and one that will be a huge leap forward for us all.

VR meetings will change the whole dynamic of real-life meetings. Just imagine how your business could benefit:

- **Distance will no longer be an issue.** Geography will no longer limit the number of people that can attend a meeting. You'll be able to enter into a virtual meeting room and speak to a colleague from the other side of the world as if they were actually in front of you. Less business travel will mean big savings in time and money.
- **Complicated ideas will be explained more effectively.** In VR meetings, you'll be able to view complex plans in glorious 3D, rather than on old-school whiteboards or monitors. This will allow you to really explore and understand concepts, and even visually manipulate data in real-time. “Data visualisation in meetings has the potential to be revolutionised by virtual reality headsets,” says Paul Jackson, principal analyst at Ovum.

VR recruitment

VR is going to do much more than help your employees work better. It's going to help businesses hire the right people for the job.

Any recruiter will be able to tell you that they face all sorts of challenges when it comes to hiring the best people for the job.

- **You can interview candidates remotely.** VR interviews are a perfect solution for candidates in remote locations who don't want to embark on a long and expensive journey to start talking with you.
- **Candidates can take a tour of the workplace.** What could sell your business to a candidate better than a virtual tour around their potential workplace? Businesses are able to offer genuine insights into the way the organisation works, without the candidate having to leave their home.

- **Candidates can try out their job and experience the culture.** VR will give your candidate a chance to experience a virtual day in their job, to see exactly what the role involves and how they'd cope. If you're especially proud of your company culture, you'll want to show it off at the earliest opportunity. VR will give you the chance of doing just that. Potential candidates can hear their future co-workers speak about the great place they work, and different company events throughout the year.
- **You can test your candidate.** If you've got a technical role that you need filled, you'll no longer need to ask a candidate to come on-site and do a practical test. Using VR technology, you'll be able to remotely assess your candidate's skills, and decide if their technical ability is up to the standards you demand. By doing all this virtually, the risk to your business is greatly reduced, as is the time and expense required to conduct the test. It's also a lot safer for your candidate.

VR team building

VR will help bring employees together and strengthen the business culture and workforce.

If you're using the same team building methods you did a few years ago, they could be doing more harm than good. In fact, your employees could be quietly dreading them. If your next team day out involves asking your employees to build a bridge over an imaginary river, or being blindfolded and guided around an obstacle by a colleague, then you could be in need of some inspiration.

- **It's a lot of fun.** You may think a traditional team building exercise paintballing is fun already, but not all your employees would agree. A VR zombie shooter set on a deserted space station, on the other hand, may be much more entertaining.
- **There's no risk.** VR team building does away with all the risks involved in outdoor activities. For example, in a VR scenario your team can happily work together to cross a rickety rope bridge without any actual danger.
- **Everyone will be a lot more engaged.** With a VR headset strapped on and stimulating the senses, your employees will be fully engaged with everything that's happening around them. It's going to be impossible for anyone to sit at the back of the room and let others get on with completing the exercise. At the moment, there is a definite gap in the market for a major organisation to build a powerful VR team-building product. An early adopter with a good product could really make an impact on this space. ▲

How a tradeshow VR activation helped launch our rebrand

Glen Strong takes us through his brand's experience rebranding at a trade show with a virtual reality experience.

We recently launched our company's rebrand at the Australasian Gaming Expo, the industry's largest trade show, held over three days annually in Sydney. The event draws a huge crowd from around Australia and overseas, and it's where all players in the industry get to see new technology and products, where information and education sessions are held, with the usual social interaction thrown in.

For MAX, a subsidiary of Tatts Group, we had an even bigger purpose this year. We were merging two existing companies into one new brand.

The trade show was the perfect opportunity to say to the industry 'we are here' and so we grabbed it with both hands. The success criteria for our team was both the level of take up of the new brand MAX and the ability for us to bring staff, clients and suppliers of both Maxgaming and Bytecrafter (our old brands) on the journey to say 'farewell' and 'hello' to the new player in the field – 'MAX'.

Weeks later, we still receive calls and feedback from show attendees telling my team about how eye-opening the experience was and the fact that they've told their friends and colleagues all about their five-minute journey into the virtual world. It certainly has resonated.

The five-minute long VR rebrand experience, was the first of its kind in Australia. We created a six-metre walk-through experience that made the participant physically say 'goodbye' to the old brands and introduced them to the new brand by progressing through the various stages of engagement/action.

From a strategic position, we developed a brand journey that drove emotion and chemical content in the brain to give users a better understanding and memory of our new brand logic and our values. And that's what we achieved with the HTC Vive and our VR development agency.

In total, we had over 1500 people go through the stand, which is a huge achievement for the team. We had a return visit rate of just over 38%, which is way above the benchmark for a trade show.

Why did we do it?

I believe that by shortening the time-frame between 'new brand' acceptance and 'engagement', I'm able to get back



**Glen Strong
is head of demand
generation
(gaming) at MAX.**

to regular discourse with customers. So the shorter the period talking about the new brand, the faster you can get back to business and the quicker your return.

The key benefit is we no longer have budgets with extended timelines educating our customers about our new brand. In our five-minute VR rebrand concept, we overcame what can often take months of communication planning and engagement.

We then use funds previously earmarked for traditional low-return branding tactics (with the corresponding longer timelines) for real, and far more immediate return to the bottom line activities.

Ultimately, we decided to launch the rebrand and experiential at our industry's premier event. We knew we'd be able to engage our customers in a way they haven't been exposed to before with VR. We also think, tactically, it's really smart as it is the place where most of our customers, clients and suppliers are all in one location. Maximum impact, minimum expense.

How did we do it?

The concept side happened quickly as I've been working with new technology, and now VR, for a number of years. I knew this could really work from a brand transition aspect, as it triggers a huge emotional response. The project focused on pumping emotion and drawing on the body's chemicals, like adrenaline, at key points in the experience to further embed both experience and memory.

Users engaged with the experiential and the purpose-built storyline via the VR headset. Without the scripted story, we had nothing. So from a marketing perspective, VR lifts the response rate – the perfect tool to both communicate and maximise message retention.



“ We had a return visit rate of just over 38%, which is way above the benchmark for a trade show. ”

The challenging part was deciding when to bring the emotions into play in the interaction. Where do we slot the feeling of anticipation? How and where do we execute the excitement, engagement, thrill, stress, wonder, fear and joy of the participant? Where do we place sound, changes in floor texture, height and angle, and, of course, wind – air direction and speed?

Enter our six-metre long VR tunnel, which represented the evolution of the old brand to the new. We mapped it out centimetre by centimetre to ensure we knew what emotions to evoke and when, as the participant progressed through the tunnel. This included thinking about the elements within the tunnel environment. We installed fans to simulate wind, lights and sounds to add to the atmosphere, as well as small tactile changes in elevated flooring and angle.

We also had our staff ‘co-pilot’ customers through the tunnel. This was an integral part of the brand logic and script. Customers now had the feeling that we were there to support them, there when it gets tough, there beside them as a partner, which is all part of the brand message. Plus, it was physical touch. A link to the real world, when the person was in the virtual one. This all combined to deliver a fully immersive experience.

Plus, we ensured that people outside the tunnel could see what the actual participant saw, via TV screens. This ensured VR was not just a one-on-one thing; it now became a group experience. The crowd were cheering complete strangers as they went through the tunnel, building more and more the feeling that they too were pseudo co-pilots. This meant that everyone – whether they went into the tunnel or were just barracking for someone from the outside – was drawn into the rebrand experience. All shared the excitement and the thrills. The strategy of building in the group factor coupled with the logic of the co-pilot took the experience to the next level.

For me, customer intimacy has always been key to any brand, any sale and any relationship with our market or our staff. VR is one of the new tools to take this into a new realm – not just because it is virtual but also because, for once, we have a way of mass engagement that can trigger the full range of emotive experiences in a way that we could only dream of years ago.

Was it worth it?

From a cost perspective, it’s not as expensive as you may think. There are two parts to the cost: there’s the upfront cost of actually creating and rolling it out. And there’s the opportunity cost of getting it done efficiently, so we can get back to business quickly. If you think about a traditional brand rollout, it could be months or years for the entire customer base to fully engage with your new brand. Using VR, we make that time-frame much, much shorter.

Then, when you think about the whole ‘life of the brand transition’, it’s even less expensive as it allows us to get back to the real business with customers, more quickly. After all, that’s why they engage with us in the first place. Customers engage with companies to do business with them – so the sooner you do that, the better.

Should Australian marketers adopt VR?

I think VR is going to be a fantastic tool for marketing professionals. Marketing has to adopt and adapt the VR logic as quickly as possible – and work out where it fits in.

VR works really well at trade shows because there’s a huge crowd opportunity to engage with. Use that element wisely. Do not just have them watch – have them participate, engage with the user, engage with the tech. Make both the participant and crowd feel special and part of something. That lessens the weighting of the technology delivering the message, while broadening its use and scope.

It’s the network effect. People are going to go away saying, ‘Did you see that VR thing?’

The sooner marketers adopt this, understand what the VR ‘tool’ is good for and what it’s not, the better. It’s just like anything else. It’s the same thinking as the other available mediums and tools we use every day. What’s good for print may not be good for radio or TV or the webpage. One personality style account manager will interact better with a customer than another. It’s just another tactical element and tool. But it’s a very important one, as it’s going to play an important part in future communication and it’s going to have a big impact on people’s emotions and psyche – and that’s a marketer’s paradise! ▲

“ We ensured that people outside the tunnel could see what the actual participant saw, via TV screens. ”



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