

Frequently asked questions about

VIRTUAL REALITY

For clients wanting to test how VR could work to tell their story, what are the basics they should have in place?

The most important considerations to have in place are the user experience and the environment. Regardless of what a business is looking to achieve with a virtual reality experience, if their employees or customers do not enjoy or believe what they are experiencing it defeats the point of them using it as they will not learn something new. You need to have a good idea of what you are trying to convey, and why.

What is the difference between virtual reality and augmented reality?

Augmented reality and virtual reality are often confused despite being very different pieces of technology. Augmented reality superimposes computer generated imagery as an overlay over the top of the user's real world surroundings, to enhance their real life experience. An example of this would be a runner wearing AR glasses, and seeing information about their speed and distance overlaid over their actual vision of their route and surroundings.

Virtual reality on the other hand is a fully immersive experience in a virtual environment - this could be a VR experience that takes you to the depths of the ocean, or allows the user to experience a film from a first person point of view.

Are there any 'real world' examples of how VR can be used in business?

The possibilities virtual reality allows for are endless. The first one that comes to mind is training. Using VR a business can effectively train their employees to deal with real life issues and hazards in a safe, virtual environment. By doing this, companies are training their staff to a high level without putting them at risk.

Another example would be the use of virtual reality to view houses or rental properties without needing to physically be there. A potential buyer could view 10 properties from the comfort of their own home, or an estate agent's office. This would be incredibly useful for people moving overseas, and could help a seller make a sale much more quickly. VR could also be used by online sellers to show a customer a product in a 360, 'real' view.

The car manufacturer Volvo has taken advantage of the capabilities of virtual reality, and created a VR experience that allows buyers to test drive the Volvo XC90 without needing to visit a showroom.

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What were the challenges of developing for virtual reality?

With virtual reality projects you need to build for the environment, as opposed to linear animation, where everything is built to camera. Because of this, you need to create a huge amount of highly detailed assets, which can be a challenge as you need to balance that with performance constraints, like the polygon count for example. You won't want to compromise the experience either.

VR projects are not particularly cheap to produce and against the investment, you'll want to be sure the end-user walks away with a lasting memory of their experience.

Another challenge is knowing how much to feature in a VR experience, too much and you can detract from the purpose of the piece, be it education or something else.

Is 2016 the year VR goes mainstream?

If there was ever a year for VR to start becoming a mainstream technology it would be 2016. With Facebook now owning Oculus, we can easily see them doing for virtual reality what they did for social media. We are also seeing more and more VR headsets enter the consumer market. Samsung's Gear VR has been out for a while, is compatible with most Samsung smartphones, and is around £80.00 to obtain.

The consumer version of the Oculus Rift comes out this year, and while it requires a high spec PC to run, it will provide much more realistic, high end experiences than headsets such as Gear VR. Likewise, in 2016 we will see the HTC Vive, and Playstation VR released. Playstation VR has a real chance of being the headset that persuades the average consumer to adopt the technology, as the Playstation 4 is vastly cheaper than a high-end PC, and Move and DualShock 4 controllers are a way of incorporating motion controls at an inexpensive cost. We will see a rise in people using VR in the workplace and at home, but we are still a way from it being a part of people's day-to-day lives.

What are its advantages over 'typical' viewing via computer or TV?

The main advantage of VR over 'typical' viewing is that the user is getting a more engaging experience, rather than passively enjoying video content as you do with TV. It is much easier for users to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves as they are in a 3D, 360 degree world that, in a lot of cases, they can interact with. VR is a tremendous storytelling tool, and promotes empathy in the user as they feel that they are physically present as events are unfolding.

Will VR really be about more than games?

In addition to the uses mentioned before for business, there are so many great uses VR could allow for consumers. Users could have an appointment with their doctor without leaving home, students could sit in a lecture regardless of where they are in the world, football fans could experience a game from the side of the pitch. These are very real future possibilities.



Will the average user be able to create and share VR content?

We are seeing this start to happen - Facebook and YouTube already support the uploading of 360 videos, but it would be great to see a new platform emerge that is specifically VR native. We have seen people make careers out of YouTube, so it makes sense that regular people would want to be able to share their own VR content. Something like this would really drive mainstream adoption - perhaps something Facebook or Google could add to their lineup?



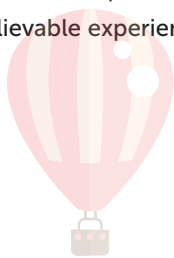


Will headsets be a commodity or a source of competitive advantage?

We feel that, with the exception of apps like YouTube and social media, that each headset will end up having its own ecosystem of games, apps and content, much like with smartphones or game consoles. We are already seeing this to an extent with Samsung Gear VR, and we will definitely see this with Playstation VR. It makes sense for each company to want to ensure enough value in their headset that their users can't easily replace it with a competitor's.

Is there an inexpensive way for people that are curious about VR to try it out?

Google have created their own VR headset, Google Cardboard, which at roughly £10 is an easy way of trying out the technology and having some really fun experiences. The headset is a piece of flat pack cardboard with a lens and a magnet that the user builds and uses with their smartphone. The low price shouldn't put you off - don't be expecting something Oculus Rift level, but there are some really engaging, believable experiences for users to enjoy.



Will there be an app which drives mainstream adoption?

It's difficult to predict what could make the average user who isn't interested in gaming pick up a headset. A big name franchise game would definitely drive mainstream gamer adoption, but that might not be of interest for the vast majority of people. We think that rather than there being a single app, it will be the wealth of apps and content that will make VR headsets worth investing in. People were sceptical about tablet devices in the beginning, until they saw the huge amount of different entertainment and productivity uses that became available.

How would you convince someone who's never used a VR headset to give one a go?

The vast majority of people in the world enjoy watching TV and films, and virtual reality feels like an extension of those experiences. The fact that you are completely immersed in a new environment while being completely safe at home seems reason enough to try it. As more content is released there will be an experience for everyone - already there are documentary experiences where you encounter prehistoric creatures, first person horror films, hot air balloon rides, and loads of hugely engaging games.

If you would like to know more about virtual reality, or have an idea for a project, contact the Sliced Bread team



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