FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VIRTUAL REALITY

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## What are the basic requirements to tell your story with VR?

The most important considerations are the user experience and the environment. Regardless of what you want to achieve with a virtual reality experience, if your employees or customers do not enjoy, or believe, what they are experiencing, the desired results will not be as good as you expect. 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 technologies. Augmented reality superimposes computer-generated imagery 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 computer-generated environment which mimics the real world to give users a fully immersive experience. 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.
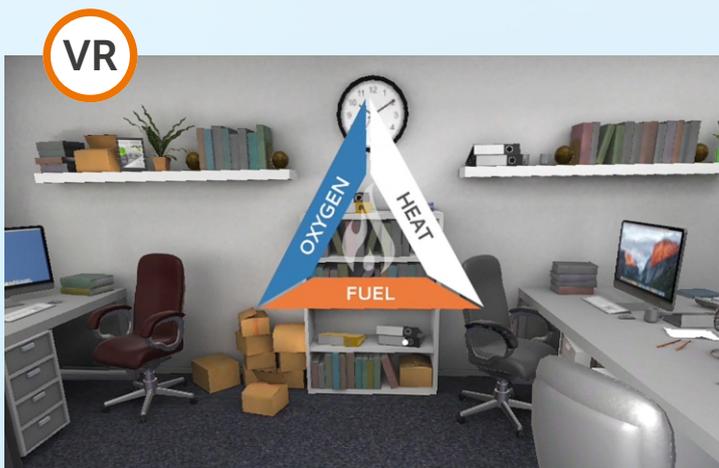
VR provides a fully immersive experience of real world training in a safe environment.

Augmented reality interior design

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What 'real world' examples are there of how VR can be used in business?

VR is being increasingly adopted across multiple industries and has a number of uses. As a matter of fact, the possibilities of virtual reality are endless.

The most prominent example of how VR is used in business settings is for training purposes. Because VR simulations replicate real-world environments and experiences, the technology is ideal for training staff in safe conditions. In the virtual world, people can make mistakes without any cost to the company's reputation or finances.

VR is particularly beneficial for employees that face high-risk and high-pressure situations. For example, you can create a virtual environment for medical surgeons to practice operations, or constructions workers to learn how to work safely in hazardous conditions without putting anybody at risk whilst they learn.

You can also use VR in a business setting from a commercial point-of-view. For example, estate agents and travel agents can use virtual reality to allow customers to view houses, rental properties and accommodation without needing to physically be there. A potential buyer could view 10 properties from the comfort of their own home, or in your office. And because VR can show a customer a product in a 360, 'real' view, you can dramatically reduce the time and effort it takes to make a sale.

Car manufacturers are taking advantage of virtual reality by creating a VR experience that allows buyers to test drive new models without needing to visit a showroom.

What are the challenges of developing virtual reality simulations?

Virtual reality projects require you 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 graphics with performance constraints such as the polygon count. You don't want to compromise experience in favour of visuals.

As you might expect, VR projects are not a low-cost investment so you want to be sure the simulation achieves your goals - for the end-user to walk away with a lasting memory.

Another challenge is knowing how much to feature in a VR experience. Too much content can overwhelm the senses and detract from the purpose of the piece and too little may not provide all the information you want to get across. This is the case for educational or commercial goals.

2020 is the year VR goes mainstream?

The amazing potential for virtual reality is unquestionable and it's only a matter of time before the technology is adopted by the mainstream. Given Facebook owns Oculus and the tech behemoths are investing billions on the technology, it's clear to see that virtual reality will dominate the digital landscape for the foreseeable future. Financial investors have forecast the VR market to hit $120bn by 2026.

We are already seeing more VR headsets enter the consumer market which makes the prices more competitive. A host of VR headgear including that is compatible with smartphones and PC's are available for less than £100. If you want better quality, VR headsets at the higher end of the market (Oculus Rift, HTC Vive, Valve Index etc) will set you back around £400+. Move and DualShock 4 controllers are a way of incorporating motion controls at an inexpensive cost.

What are te 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 and staff training?

In addition to the uses we mentioned above, there are many other uses businesses can adopt VR for. Users can arrange appointments with their customers or patients without either of you being in the same room, students could sit in a lecture regardless of where they are in the world, football fans could experience a game from pitchside, shoppers can try on clothes, travellers can visit a holiday destination they want to experience and consumers can try products before they buy them. These possibilities for the future are endless.

Will the headset 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 have its own ecosystem of games, apps and content, much like you see with smartphones and game consoles. We are already seeing this to an extent with Samsung Gear VR and Playstation VR etc. It makes sense for these companies to ensure they deliver value in their headsets so their users don't want to replace it with a competitor's.

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

Google has created its 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 a 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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