

THE EVENT MARKETER'S GUIDE TO VIRTUAL REALITY

How VR works, how to use it at events, best practices
and most-asked questions. Brought to you by Helios Interactive

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VR HAS ARRIVED

What virtual reality is, how it works and why it's here to stay

There is something about those headsets. Strap one on, look left and then right, and suddenly you're not in Kansas anymore. That's right, we're talking the latest in virtual reality or VR, a medium that involves video, software and head-tracking headsets to immerse users in full field-of-view environments. Chances are you've seen at least one application of VR this year, maybe at a trade show, a touring experience, or gaming expo.

But while the past year has seen an explosion of interest in the space, VR has, in fact, been around for decades. Thanks in part to advances in cheaper and more mobile devices, as well as the buzz brought on by Oculus's infamous Kickstarter campaign (and Facebook's purchase of the company for a cool \$2 billion), the VR market is evolving and growing quickly. And its influence is only going to get stronger as new players emerge on the scene and marketers build strategies surrounding fully immersive event experiences.

Indeed, there are a few new players emerging in the VR space: the Samsung Gear VR, developed in collaboration with Oculus VR, that's powered by the Samsung Galaxy Note 4. There is Sony's development of Project Morpheus for PlayStation 4. Apple has patents issued for VR experiences. Valve may have the best overall experience with the as-of-yet unreleased Vive. And then there is Google Cardboard, the simple yet elegant viewer that for three to four bucks turns a device into a VR headset. Can you see the future? As the landscape explodes with more immersive gaming, affordable devices for the home and downloadable apps, it all adds up to more opportunities for event marketers to use live experiences for platforms where branded VR content can be seen and shared.



At the heart of virtual reality is content, and depending on the type of VR use, there are different methods of developing it. You can create computer-generated content for VR, good for data visualizations or creating new universes. You can shoot video with a series of cameras and stitch them together. You can use a combination of the two. Think virtual "walk-throughs" of an exhibit build during the R&D process. Think never having to abide by the confines of an on-site footprint. (Sports property sponsors, take note.) Think the re-definition of an "immersive" experience.

Mike Schaiman, Managing Partner at San Francisco-based innovation lab Helios Interactive, says VR "checks all the boxes," including innovation, personalization, share-ability and measurability. With headsets and a good set of headphones on, users are free of distractions. Amp up deployments with tactile elements, such as rumble chairs or wind gusts; pop up a few LED screens to depict the experience behind the goggles, and even spectators have a decent show to watch.

"There is no other medium we've seen as powerful as virtual reality," Schaiman says. "The word that is being used a lot now is 'presence,' that putting on a VR headset will actually establish presence in your mind and body. You may have been in an event space ten seconds before you put that headset on, but now you have arrived in the driving simulator, or on a football field, or on the surface of Mars ... you have arrived in a universe we custom built for you, and all brought to you by _____ (insert your brand here)."

What do you need to know about virtual reality to get started? Read on as Helios Interactive gives you the skinny on VR and explains:

- The different uses for VR, and three ways you can use them right now
- What to do (and what not to do to) with your VR experience
- The top five questions about VR, with expert answers



THREE WAYS MARKETERS CAN USE VR

VIDEO

Highest Use: Creating VIP Experiences

Imagine putting fans backstage at a concert, on the ground at a festival, or courtside at an NBA game. Maybe you even take them inside an experience on another continent. Video for VR allows marketers to capture a real-world setting, something that's actually being done somewhere, in 360-degree panoramic and 3D format. The idea here: giving audiences access. Video can be captured in a few different ways, from using wide-view lenses that can "see" 180 degrees behind them, or using a specialized rig with multiple cameras mounted in a circular format. Stitching software allows you to take all the separate video files and merge them as one. Think of a globe unpeeled like an apple. By putting on a VR headset, you view those pieces rolled back up into a sphere. "There are endless brand possibilities, especially at venues like stadiums where every fan wants to be courtside, every fan wants to be in that locker room for the speech at halftime," says Ben McChesney, CTO at Helios Interactive. On the horizon: live streaming.

Key Takeaways:

- Video takes planning. You need to identify sites, create a shooting schedule and hire a crew. The uploading of files and stitching can take time, too. Good news, is that more "all-in-one," streamlined solutions are on the horizon.
- As with all applications of VR, you need to keep movements subtle. Any movement faster than a walking pace for more than a few seconds will disorient the user.
- Watch for image quality. Many older panoramic or 360-degree videos will not translate well on newer high-resolution devices. Know what platform (type of headset device) you plan to use before developing

content.

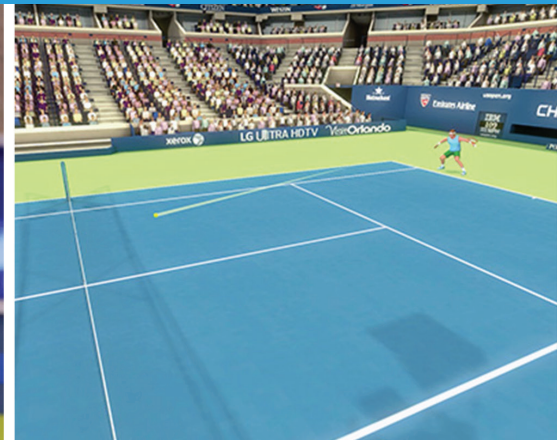
IMMERSIVE CG

Highest Use: Pre-Visualization and Interactivity

Immersive CG (or computer-generated) content for VR describes scenarios that are still "real-world" or represent a "real place," but instead of being captured with video they are recreated in 3D. It involves the same principles architects and game designers use, in taking real spaces and recreating them as true to life as possible. The idea being: recreate and design worlds in which the user can interact and explore. While a video VR experience is limited because the cameras are stationary, with CG, users can look down a certain path—and then travel down that path. For Lexus, Helios Interactive created an immersive CG experience that allowed consumers to get behind the wheel and experience what it would be like to drive a Lexus on a real racetrack. Giving the experience a realistic feel, there was an arcade-style machine for users to sit in with a steering wheel, pedals and a moveable seat. Outside of consumer experiences, immersive CG can be a useful tool for fabricators. "It's pretty easy to drop an Oculus camera into the 3D model and be able to walk into the space before it's even built and this can be an especially useful tool for bigger or non-standard builds; you can get a better sense of the scale," says Surya Buchwald, Head of Helios Labs.

Key Takeaways:

- Incorporate a "grounding element" or a frame of reference such as a cockpit, or in the case of the Lexus case study, a dashboard, to cut down on simulator sickness. Creating a small environment for the experience is helpful, too, whether it be a comfortable chair or other accessory that is in line with the VR content.



Key Takeaways (continued):

- Beware of “uncanny valley,” a phenomenon when features aren’t quite realistic enough, which can detract from the user experience. Think human faces that aren’t quite right, or a brick wall that once approached within in VR is a flat pixelated mess.
- CG is the most agile is the most agile, flexible, and creative of the VR experience options. This takes a bigger, badder computer to run a quality application but the end result can be an exceptional experience for consumers.

ABSTRACT

Highest Use: Game-like Experiences, Graphics and Demos

The third use combines real-life content for VR, and recreating real-life content for VR for more “abstract” experiences. The sky’s the limit on what you can create. Brands can incorporate shapes and colors, even smells, that evoke moods the brand wants to represent without it being a spot-on representation of a product. Helios at the 2014 Chase US Open, created the “Chase Review,” where fans experienced the match from the umpire’s chair. Using an Oculus VR headset and headphones, fans looked into a CG version of Arthur Ashe stadium during a crucial match point. Real puffs of air were triggered when in-game tennis balls flew past the user.

Body-tracking devices can help a user interact within these VR worlds either with their own hands or a CG-created overlaid tool, such as a wand or paintbrush. “Something we think has great potential is starting with 360-degree video of the actual environment a user is in, have them put on a headset that projects the world around them, but that allows you to build a new environment on top of that,” says Buchwald. “It could be special effects, graphics or data that they can interact with.”

Key Takeaways:

- You want users to either be sitting or have something to hold onto. For many people, if they look down and don’t see a ground, they’ll feel like they are falling. This will not be a good experience.
- Consider a gentle intro and a gentle ending. Maybe you begin with a space that looks like a room, and then transforms into the abstract. As with all forms of VR, don’t surprise people too much, and remind them that they can always take off the headset if they start to feel sick.
- Incorporate tactile elements. It’s not hard to add a scent or wind or sensation to the VR activation space you create.



VR QUESTIONS: ANSWERED

What are the most common questions marketers have about VR in events? We sit down with Mike Schaiman, Managing Partner at Helios Interactive, for a Q&A.

1. What are the biggest pitfalls to avoid when deploying VR in the events space?

Simulator sickness. You need to adopt best practices, because there are a lot of things that you should not be doing, that you cannot be doing, when creating them, such as moving people around without their consent or control. You need to make the users comfortable, have staff that explain what they are going to experience, and remind them, as always, that they can take the headset off.

2. What are the hygienic concerns around VR that people should be aware of?

This is definitely an issue among wearables. We turn to our best practices which address hygienic concerns, including wiping down the headsets after each use. There are pieces of the headset which are at the points of contact to the skin that are easy to replace. Bottom line, you want to be transparent and obvious with your cleaning practices on-site.

3. Is VR a scalable digital solution?

Yes, from two different directions. The first is the eventual establishment of downloadable apps for this, once people have their own devices, and providing them with a peripheral such as Google Cardboard. Once there are methods of distribution and channels to get this out to consumers on a broader basis, then the content that a brand uses at a particular event can have a pretty big ripple effect and get a lot more exposure. So, from an investment perspective, from brands, it can make a lot of sense to enable those experiences to happen. The second is because of the number of devices out there. Devices are relatively inexpensive. All in, the Gear VR will run you around \$800 to \$900 for each installation. So if brands have a bunch of events or ten different events at the same time, it's not terribly expensive to spend the



thousand bucks to have this experience at each one. The ease of setup also means you don't have to have onsite techs at every deployment.

4. What are the biggest hurdles to VR use at events now?

Throughput is the biggest hurdle. You can have multiple devices in a footprint pretty easily and it scales really nicely; you can recreate the experience on a large screen to drive participation. We actually created a custom queuing system allowing users to check in and for us to text them five minutes before their turn. You can have a board that displays how many names are before them, and what their average wait time is. That's a big deal for people. Consumers don't want to go to an event to wait in line for two hours. If you can walk up, add your name to a queue, and avoid waiting in a line, it's going to be a better consumer experience and lot more positive for everybody involved.

5. Where do you see VR going in the events space?

Integrating gesture-based action, integrating peripherals allowing users to control their experience within the space. Those are both things that are likely to happen and influence event deployments sooner than later. We're already building experiences with hand tracking, where there's a head mounted device that allows you to see your hand in virtual space. The Valve VR system (the Vive) has some really incredible next-gen control systems. We can also have multiple users in an environment—that's really fun. Live stream is a big one that's not ready yet. It's a few years away. But that will certainly be a piece, where you can tap into an immersive 360 camera that is streaming and put them sideline at an event or a game, or up in the stands at a stadium. I can see that being a virtual meeting of the future.

ABOUT HELIOS INTERACTIVE

Helios specializes in building engaging, interactive experiences for consumers in the events and retail channels. We use a variety of technologies to achieve our goals, including touch, gesture, augmented reality, and virtual reality. Our pursuit to create better brand interactions results in thoughtful design, effective social sharing, and meaningful data collection. This focus helps us meet our clients goals, both now and in the future.