

Doing business in a parallel universe

If you're not a gamer, you'll be wondering what the fuss is all about. Dion Chang delves into virtual reality (VR) and discovers a new entertainment genre



British Airways transported pedestrians in Europe to America via Oculus Rift in a brand promotion. Users were able to experience a virtual bronco ride in Dallas, roller-skate on a boardwalk in Los Angeles or ice-skate in Central Park. Thomas Cook followed suit with a concept travel store that offered customers a “VR holiday” to help promote its tour offerings.

While these promotions are innovative, it's more telling when supplementary services and businesses start mushrooming around the trend, indicating that this is no passing fad, but a new industry that's about to boom.

Creative agency Party New York recently released Virmo, the world's first VR motion sickness relief capsules. “VR motion sickness” is a very real side-effect suffered by those immersed in VR technology. Symptoms can include disorientation, headaches, dizziness and nausea caused by the visually induced perception of self-motion that VR brings.

Soon after Virmo's release, a crowd-funding campaign was launched for a stool designed specifically to reduce VR motion sickness. The natural human inclination is to lean towards a desired travel direction, which is what many people do when in a VR world, adding to the motion sickness. VRGO is a pod-like stool using motion-sensing technology to allow users to continually lean and swivel, thus aligning their bodies more with what they're seeing in VR.

At the close of 2015, Samsung launched its own dedicated web browser called Samsung Internet for Gear VR, specifically for the growing VR content industry, signalling a real-world tipping point of VR as a new, mainstream entertainment option. This parallel universe is now officially open for business. 🌈



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In a few months, The VOID will open its doors in Utah, USA. It's the first of a global franchise of virtual entertainment centres, combining augmented reality, sensory technology and wearable tech. Visitors will be transported into fantasy environments and immersed in a mind-blowing, interactive gaming experience using VR.

The entertainment centre itself has a physical structure which is transformed into fantasy landscapes once you enter the game. Visitors will wear a headset called a Rapture HMD (which provides visual and audio immersion), a Rapture Vest (which transmits bodily sensations to the player) and Rapture Gloves, which allow players to interact physically with the virtual environments. These already include haunted castles, dinosaur safaris and futuristic battlefields on alien planets.

Instead of merely playing a game, you can now “physically” enter it.

The fact that The VOID is just the first in a global franchise is noteworthy. This isn't just a once-off project: other global brands have also started delving into the wonders of VR entertainment.

Last year Marriott Hotels launched VR postcards, in partnership with Samsung. Guests simply order a Samsung Gear VR set to be delivered to their rooms, which then allows them to choose between three specially created VR postcards: a trip to the Andean Mountains in Chile, an exploration of Beijing or a visit to a Rwandan ice-cream shop.

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