

VR content should be engaging, relevant and appropriate

 By [David Limbert](#)

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VR is increasingly becoming a part of the experiential marketing landscape as brands become more confident in embracing the tech. Yet is it always appropriate?

Who remembers the shot of Mark Zuckerberg walking in a room of people all wearing VR headsets at the Samsung Galaxy S7 launch? There was something creepy, and vaguely Orwellian about the picture. The Twitter-verse jumped on the image, but one comment that came up time and time again was what was the point of them all being there, if they were just strapping on a headset? It might be the most obvious point, but that doesn't stop it being a good one.



Image supplied.

Since that moment, VR has grown there are several products on the market to choose from. The novelty of experiencing VR for the first time is disappearing, but in the UK and US we're seeing the technology shoehorned into live experiences. But it's yet to take off in South Africa.

VR content should be engaging

So, you've got budget to bring people to your event just to stick pricey headsets on them. You'll be out of a job as soon as people realise they can get that exact experience at home, and you've wasted an opportunity to engage your audience.

The use of VR in the future will rely on us, marketers and event professionals creating engaging virtual experiences people can plug into from anywhere. If the event is live, we need to focus on making it memorable and unique. We can't use the latest technology with no thought towards how it improves the experience, or how it connects people.

VR content should be engaging, as all communication should, but it also needs to be relevant and appropriate. To figure out if VR is the right thing for an event, an activation or a brand engagement, you need to review what it is meant to achieve, and assess whether using it can deliver results. We can take a few cues from how VR has been used in consumer activations overseas:

Time vs. appeal

People are busy, and even the promise of the most amazing VR experience needs to be in an environment where people have the time to participate. Alzheimer's Research UK recently set up a VR installation at London's St Pancras International station as part of its 'Walk Through Dementia' campaign, where visitors were encouraged to experience first-hand what it's like living with dementia. Setting up an activation in a place where people have some time to kill (trains in the UK rarely run on time), provides a great opportunity for customers to engage with the event.

Inclusive vs. exclusive

VR can sometimes be isolating, both for those using it and for those on the outside – so the setting needs to be appropriate. But there are others, who find a moment of escapism and tranquillity spot-on. Imagine an in-store activation that transported shoppers away from the bustle of the mall to a sun-dappled wheat field, providing a moment of peace for the customer.

VR takes you away from the moment (and we're constantly being reminded to live 'in the moment') and transforms you into another world, a world without your peers. If you were already having a good time before you placed on the headset, doing so might actually detract from your enjoyment. Mark Zuckerberg has already formed a social VR team at Facebook to work towards VR's inclusivity but it could be years before any kind of real breakthrough and, even then, gathering in a virtual world with friends to see the hottest act perform, might just mean a digital version of ourselves exists? So, does that mean consumers would ever truly be there, meaning brands never truly connect or engage with their users/consumers?

The isolation factor needn't be something to be feared. It just needs to be acknowledged and understood so it is accounted for when the choice to use VR is made. VR is brilliant, it is taking the experiences and the event landscape to a new level, allowing marketers to tap into places both physical and emotional that were previously unreachable. But to make this work, you must ask, is VR appropriate and relevant for my event, because if it's not, you've just spent a chunk of your budget on a very expensive gimmick.

ABOUT DAVID LIMBERT

David Limbert heads up the creative services department at Magnetic Storm and has a solid background in theatre. Following his studies at the Guildford School of Acting and qualifying as a stage manager, he cemented his reputation for excellence in the UK theatre world and worked at the Rep Theatre, the London City Ballet, and the world-famous, West End theatres.

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