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Virtual reality gains with marketers following wider availability via Facebook, YouTube

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Shangri-La guest using its virtual reality headset

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By **Brielle Jaekel**

Since Facebook and YouTube introduced 360-video along with hardware devices from Google, Samsung and Microsoft, marketers are stepping up efforts to leverage virtual reality to connect with consumers, showing the technology's potential beyond gaming.

Virtual reality was originally thought to be a huge innovation within the video game industry, but brands have unlocked its potential for marketing through various video and interactive experiences. Mobile creates a huge potential in terms of technology and optimization to develop virtual reality experiences and now that the innovation is more accessible for brands, we are seeing more and more usage of virtual reality.

"Brands are starting to see virtual reality as a powerful marketing tool, enabling consumers to better interact with a brand and experience a product or service before purchase," said Endri Tolka, co-founder and COO of YouVisit.

"The growing popularity of VR has a lot to do with the tool's ability to create a strong emotional bond with consumers.

"For the past several years, brands have relied on social media to cultivate this bond, but are now finding it difficult to rise above the static," he said. "Through early VR adoption, brands have realized they can create these emotional bonds, while also differentiating themselves from their competitors.

"Additionally, now that Facebook and YouTube support 360-degree VR experiences, brands have more incentive to adopt this new technology."

Innovation introduction

Facebook and YouTube have made virtual reality easily accessible for marketers to serve to consumers with 360-degree video in which users simply move their smartphones to view around the virtual space of video. The innovation is still fresh for consumers so playing with it boasts a positive and fun experience for users.

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GE's 360 video on Facebook

Google has also launched a cardboard contraption in which users insert their smartphones and can look around virtual reality content simply by moving their while also blocking out actual surroundings for a more immersive experience. Vehicle manufacture Mini also developed its own cardboard creation for a similar experience, which it rolled out to Mini insider members.

□

Mini's virtual reality film

While gaming was originally thought to be the primary use for the technology, marketers are making it their own by creating experiences that form significant relationships with users. Brands make lasting impressions by introducing exciting, new and fun experience for consumers, which is so important.

"Virtual reality has managed to hold its ground in the gaming world from the start, but only recently have people and companies really started to understand the power of the technology for business," Mr. Tolka said. "With the introduction of new devices such as the Samsung Gear VR and Google Cardboard, the barriers to accessing VR have been significantly lowered.

"With more affordable options, this technology has been able to grow from being just a futuristic technology for gamers to a mainstream technology that can help to fulfill consumer's everyday needs," he said.

Brand leverage

As the innovation gains more steam it is likely that virtual reality will become a staple in marketing and the majority of brands will leverage it.

For instance, GE and vehicle manufacturer Mini transported New York Times subscribers into fully immersive brand experiences as sponsors of the publication's first virtual reality film, which is being released via a smartphone application ([see more](#)).

Bacardi Limited's Dewar's Scotch brand also bolstered its mobile marketing efforts by introducing a 360-degree virtual reality experience on a mobile-optimized microsite, enabling fans to take a guided tour through the Scottish highlands and immersing them in how the whiskey is made ([see more](#)).

"When Facebook entered the market with its \$2 billion purchase of Oculus, the industry did a collective head turn, finally taking notice of VR as a potential platform for entertainment, marketing and more," said Mr. Tolka. "Now you have three major tech companies bringing new viewing hardware to the market including Google, Samsung and Microsoft.

"Adoption of immersive content will grow as the hardware gets less costly and more consumers buy into it," he said.

Final Take

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