

AUTOMOTIVE

Volkswagen debuts internal VR platform for auto design

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Volkswagen engineers can build and collaborate on new car designs in virtual reality. Image credit: Volkswagen

By DANNY PARISI

Germany's Volkswagen Group is innovating its office culture by developing virtual reality technologies, including some behind-the-scenes tech built to streamline production meetings.

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While VR has many uses in the consumer-facing field, Volkswagen and its partners, HTC Vive and tech startup Innoactive, have developed a new tool for designing the brand's automobiles that uses the innovative technology to put workers from different parts of the world in the same virtual room together. Volkswagen's tool will debut at Digitility, a tech conference in Germany.

"Exchanging knowledge is just as important as bundling knowledge," said Dennis Abmeier, a member of **Volkswagen** Group IT and the digital realities team, focused on VR, Wolfsburg, Germany. "That's why we came up with the Volkswagen Digital Reality Hub central platform in collaboration with Innoactive.

"All employees have access to all existing VR elements as well as existing knowledge via the platform," he said. "That way, we enable individual units to implement new use cases quickly and jointly move in VR applications so they can plan new workflows interactively."

Virtual reality

Virtual reality has been steadily creeping forward in popularity over the last few years.

With more companies coming out with their own virtual reality platforms, including Google's newly announced Daydream, brands are beginning to look outside traditional entertainment or experience models for VR and into more utilitarian aspects.

Volkswagen is taking an innovative approach in this regard with a new VR tool designed to assist in the process of designing and manufacturing its automobiles, including its high-end brands such as Audi.

The tool, developed in collaboration with Innoactive and powered by HTC Vive, will allow Volkswagen designers to collaborate remotely and work on the same models as if they were in the same room.



The view from Volkswagen's VR platform. Image credit: Volkswagen

Additionally, the tool will let employees see three-dimensional virtual renderings of a vehicle and inspect them in real time.

The program can be accessed through the HTC Vive Business Edition, a VR headset developed specifically for use in businesses. This tool will be housed in the Volkswagen Digital Reality Hub, a digital center that allows Volkswagen employees to have access to its programs.

In the future, Volkswagen is planning to continue filling the Digital Reality Hub with more VR tools to smooth the design process.

Growing tech

According to Google statistics, VR has grown by nearly four times in the last year. And while this piece of tech still lacks in accessibility to the mainstream, both brands and consumers are taking the leap and embracing it ([see story](#)).

Many luxury brands that have taken to using VR have been using it as a customer-facing tool, something that gives consumers a unique experience related to the brand.

For example, Crystal helped prospective travelers imagine themselves on one of its cruises with the addition of virtual reality technology.

Crystal Preview allows travelers to view Crystal's Serenity and Mozart ships and select shore destinations in 360 degrees, transporting consumers to the Arctic or locations along the Danube River. Most travelers consult digital channels before booking, making virtual reality another way to help them make decisions about their itineraries ([see story](#)).

A demonstration of Volkswagen's VR program

But Volkswagen is coming at VR from a different perspective, imagining how it can affect consumer experience in more indirect ways by shaping the construction of the cars those consumers will eventually buy.

The suite of programs that will eventually live in the Digital Reality Hub will be usable by employees across a number of Volkswagen's brands, including Audi, Volkswagen and SEAT.

As virtual reality continues to grow in popularity, brands should investigate ways that they can streamline the business-side as well as offer unique experiences to customers.

"Virtual reality creates the ideal conditions for cross-brand and cross-site collaboration," said Jasmin Mller, head of [Audi](#) brand logistics, Ingolstadt, Germany.