

Can virtual reality help to create a memorable customer experience?

Just as social and mobile platforms have transformed the way we interact with banks, utilities, local councils, telecoms, transport and media providers, the first buzz of excitement from the possibilities of augmented (AR) and virtual reality (VR) enabled products is starting to scale up.



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This technology has the potential to engage customers like never before, drawing them into a completely immersive experience with the use of a head mounted display and peripherals. It can also be applied to create augmented reality experiences extending the real world with virtual elements.

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Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) hardware is set to follow the same upward curve as smartphones and tablets. Within just a few years, the latter developed the performance levels, support, application ecosystem and secure connectivity that took them from a novel push marketing sideshow to a fully-fledged mass customer interaction channel. The numbers are telling much the same story for VR and AR.

The more sophisticated headset hardware driving these platforms is now being brought to market at affordable price points for the first time and we have already seen elements of mainstream public consciousness with games such as Pokémon Go raising awareness beyond a niche gaming segment. The number of active users is projected to hit 171 million by 2018^[1].

Projected virtual reality headsets unit sales worldwide in 2016 (in million), by device^[2]

How do you make it work for your organisation?

KPMG Nunwood's 2016 UK Analysis outlined that there has been an uplift in brand desire to create memorable experiences – those that live in the memory, either directly through the superior quality of the experience, or indirectly through association.

“The decisions we make in life are based on our memories – not our experiences. This distinction, between experience and memory, is becoming the new battleground in the field of customer experience”, David Conway, Director, KPMG Nunwood.

Virtual reality has a huge potential to give greater emotional resonance to objects and topics through the sensory impact of the experience. The technology can provide information in an instant, easy-to-understand format, supporting multi-sensory learning. Tactile kinaesthetic interactions can flex the content and the customers' preferred experience. They can create highly compelling hypothetical experiences based on their own circumstances by experiencing multiple scenarios in real time without the need for making judgments based on one-dimensional representations.

Collectively, what these experiences do is to help create a level of intimacy which is not only informative, but memorable, connecting customers back to brand promises.

Take a look at [Volvo](#). They describe themselves as a 'human centric' company in terms of the products they develop and the way they want to interact with their customers. They've incorporated Microsoft HoloLens to help customers explore their cars in detail. They can see feature, colours, options and some of the hidden benefits that paper doesn't bring to life. It seamlessly combines the real and digital worlds and lives up to the brand's promise of using technology to make life simpler for their customers.

TOMS is a high end retailer of shoes. With every product purchased, the organisation will help a person in need. This is a core part of their brand's purpose and to bring this to life, they have created a virtual reality chair in their flagship store in California. Once the VR headset starts playing, [customers are transported](#) to a remote village in Peru. Here they experience a drive into the village with one of the company's giving partners. They arrive at a school where children are running around in happy greeting. They're incredibly happy and grateful for the gift. It's an emotional and memorable experience which takes customers closer to understanding the impact of TOMS' mission.

Both these organisations, in their different ways, have leveraged this disruptive technology to get closer to their customers. They've shared their brand promises in ways which are immersive and emotive, providing a memorable customer experience.

AR and VR is not a game changer – yet. As a nascent technology it does however bring first mover advantage in terms of customer differentiation and unlocking early operational performance benefits. With the increasing pace of platform development and integration, and the pace of accessibility this may be sooner than expected.

[1] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/426469/active-virtual-reality-users-worldwide/>

[2] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/458037/virtual-reality-headsets-unit-sales-worldwide/>