

# Virtual Reality: Focusing the Eyeballs

Advertisers and media owners face bigger challenges than they've faced in a lifetime, but virtual reality (VR) offers a promising future that allows brands to connect with people in rich, personal, immersive ways by keeping them engrossed in a controlled environment where they can monitor more data than ever. VR isn't just an exciting new frontier, it represents an entirely new (virtual) world for smart businesses to capitalize on, and the ultimate and almost inevitable endpoint in the last 120 years of screen development – the ultimate in user engagement.

By Tom Goodwin, SVP of Strategy & Innovation, Havas Media

## More content, less attention

**W**e are in strange, uncharted times. For brand owners, marketers, tech companies, and agencies, technology is becoming our greatest ally and our worst enemy, and increasingly so. We may now see the

greatest rates of change we've ever seen, and yet they are as slow now as they will ever be. How do companies navigate accelerating times, an abundance of opportunity, fast fads, and the most demanding customers we've ever known? The key lies in understanding the new opportunities and threats before others.

Probably the greatest challenge in the world of advertising right now is winning the battle for attention in an age of distraction and abundance.

The problems are two-fold. Firstly, we're now so overmediated that our attention has never been less focused. Advertisers battle to be one of 20,000 marketing messages unleashed on typical adults per day in the developed world. One solution isn't interruption but engagement, and thus content marketers work to win interest but struggle against a world of endless, quality, free content at our fingertips, reachable at any moment.



## About Tom Goodwin

Tom Goodwin is SVP of Strategy and Innovation at Havas Media. His role is to understand new technology, behaviors and platforms and ideate & implement solutions for clients. An industry provocateur & commentator, he's a columnist for the Guardian and Mediapost, and regular contributor to Ad Age, Ad Week, Digiday, and TechCrunch, which was the launchpad for his now famous "Uber owns no vehicles, Facebook creates no content..." quote that lit up the Internet this past spring. Tom brought the Western world's first QR code-based campaign, developed the first interactive outdoor ad, and created the first click-to-install mobile ad. His approach is grounded in a belief that the role of tech is to solve problems, address consumer needs, and support business goals.



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How can your brand compete with the collective works of Shakespeare, the very best journalism, every album ever uploaded, every Oscar-winning film, and pics of your best friend's baby?

What's more, our attention is being split further, due to this extreme abundance and technology that surrounds us. We snatch glimpses of films between tweets from our phones. We're creating ever more media-moments, new screens like wearables, new moments like waiting for a latte. We've become addicted to stimulus; continuous partial attention isn't just possible, it's our default position. How else can we now consume 15.5 hours of media a day and manage to sleep and eat? Our attention is shifting to snatched moments, the quick glance. According to Byron Reeves at Stanford University, the atomic unit of attention is now nineteen seconds, not the luxurious thirty of a TV ad, and yet attention spans seem to still be shortening with each & every new technology and behavior – the glance at the smartwatch, the snatched moments in elevators, the ephemeral canvas of SnapChat. The notion of the mobile as a second screen was common in the early 2000's, now we see mobiles and wearables as the primary screen, with the other screens fading into the background. Something about proximity and our

demands for the immediate make our closest screen the primary access point.

## Our destiny is on-screen

In these challenging, changing, turbulent times, virtual reality offers a most promising and exciting solution, a chance to offer uniquely-valuable, unprecedentedly-compelling experiences that carve out quality moments. I'd go further to suggest that the development of VR represents a logical ultimate endpoint of the development cycles of technology and screens for the last 120 years. But how does this work within the greater context?

It often feels like the changing role of screens and media is complex and reflects the chaos, fragmentation and rapid rates of change of technology and life today. It seems very complicated; we've gone from consuming media in large movie theaters, to families watching TV, to a gaze increasingly shifting to computers and phones, but it's not as random as it may seem.

We've actually progressed in a remarkably tidy, linear way, from cinema to TV to desktop to laptop to smartphone. In other words, we've moved ever closer to ever smaller screens. We've gone from consuming

in large groups of people, to families, to mostly personal. We've gone from one-way media to interactive media, from devices without inputs (movies) to simple inputs (remote control) to accelerometers, light sensors, GPS, and more (smartphones).

By this progression, virtual reality is the endpoint on this path, the most personal experience with the closest screen, providing the most connected, most immersive experience the world has ever known and can ever imagine – a chance to finally capture attention, focus the eyeballs, and build relationships with the most captive audience one can hope for in this age.

## A chance too good to miss

It's no wonder that the largest and most ambitious media companies of this age are making aggressive moves into this. If you're Facebook and you're concerned about losing eyeballs to messaging or SnapChat, owning an entire new immersive experience is not only useful, but essential. If you're Google and your business is based on capturing data, then the opportunity to own a controlled, data-rich environment that just happens to be where we potentially spend far

more time in the future is too good to miss. From Microsoft to Apple to Facebook to Google to Oculus, whether as a device maker, media owner, app developer, or content provider, this is a space rich with opportunities to connect and thus vast sums of advertising, production, and hardware money.

The opportunities for content in this age are immense. If the virtual world is an alternative world, then every single contact and advertising opportunity that exists in the real world can at the very least be replicated. What do outdoor ads become? What does TV advertising look like on a VR screen? What about branded content? Branded utility? Does VR have an app store? Gaming? Native advertising has never seen a canvas so large. In this world of abundance and possibility, the hardest thing is coming to terms with quite how profound and plentiful these opportunities are. This is a future so creatively rich, it's easy to lose way.

Before we start to ideate, give a moment's thought to the variety of use cases and products.

### AR vs. VR

AR is about adorning real life; it's not transportation to the unknown but providing another lattice of information on what we experience for real, whether

it's looking through an AR experience on a smartphone or Microsoft's new HoloLens, AR is about additive experiences, not transformational. So in this environment, ideation revolves around embellishment. How do we make the real-world retail experience better? How can we make our product easier to use? How do we offer customer experience in a better way? How do we make it easier to find our premises? What can we do to augment the current TV broadcast to make it more compelling and profitable? AR remains more pragmatic, less escapist – more tool than diversion.

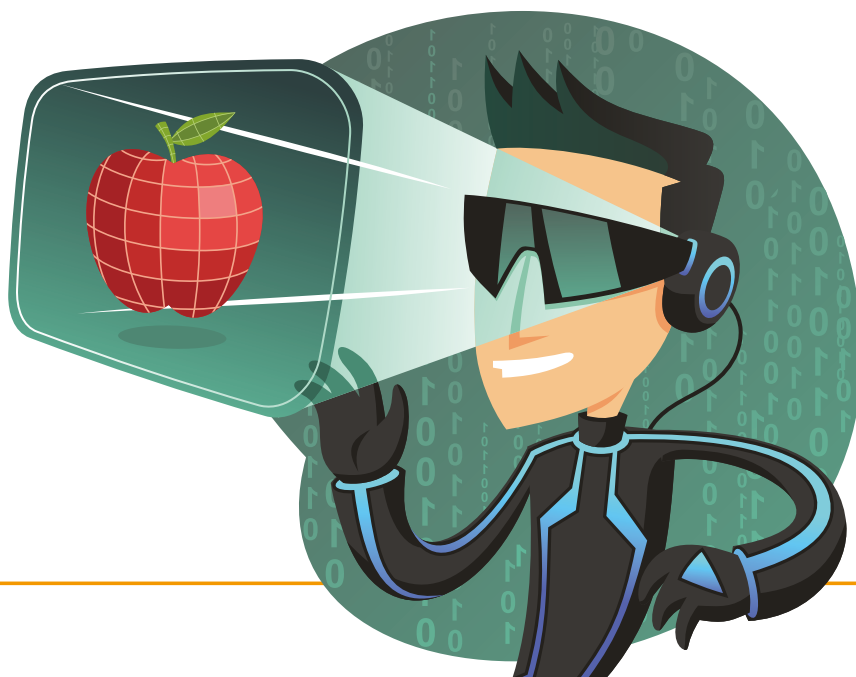
### Two kinds of VR

Today, the VR market is generally split into Google Cardboard, a sub-USD20 experience that allows mass uptake of experiences, and professional quality kit like Oculus Rift that offers one-off moments to people at special events.

For the moment, quality VR is not a media channel. We can either go mainstream and hope to broadcast to several hundred-thousand who may have access to Google Cardboard, or we can go narrowcast and offer an incredibly rich experiential campaign at events where people line up to have a try. The trade-off for the moment is clear, either go broadcast with something unremarkable or go deep with a view and hope word-of-mouth spreads to those beyond the event perimeter.

## Where things get exciting

The real promise for brands lies in the medium-term future, a time when 4K content is made for a fraction of the current cost, where processing power is ten times today's speed at one-tenth the cost – a world where VR headsets



# SCREEN EVOLUTION

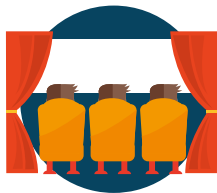
## CLOSENESS & CONTROL

Screens have grown more connected, interactive and intuitive as they have moved closer. The viewer is more aware of the experience. The experience is more aware of the viewer.

### CINEMAS

**1900's**

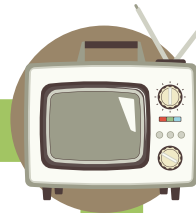
- 30 meters away
- 100+ viewers
- No control



### TELEVISION

**1950's**

- 3 meters away
- 2-to-4 viewers
- Crude control



### HANDHELDS

**2005**

- 20cm away
- 1-to-2 viewers
- Precise control



### COMPUTERS

**1990's**

- 50cm away
- 1-to-3 viewers
- Interactive control



### VIRTUAL REALITY

**2015**

- 3cm away
- 1 viewer
- Intuitive control



Source: Tom Goodwin, Havas Media

move from Kickstarter to Best Buy. It is in this world where things get exciting.

If AR and VR are about creating enhanced or alternative life, we're ideating in the most fertile fascinating area we can imagine, and yet one more incredible dimension exists. While cinemas or TV's or laptops can offer rich screens and high production values, they've only been experiences of limited input. What is unique about AR and VR is the offer of rich outputs and very complex inputs. For the first time ever, we can use gloves to control our experience. We can walk on 3D treadmills, and use voice activation or glances or gestures. The world of VR is of overt abundance and creative freedom, to a fault. In fact, the biggest issue we find is that creativity typically needs constraints. If anything and everything is possible, how do we ideate with such open boundaries?


## Some thought-starters

Many brands want to offer exclusive experiences or create rich brand moments, yet are constrained by the intrinsic tension between specialness and scale. So, how can Pepsi give you a virtual front-row seat at a Beyoncé concert. How can Verve Cliquot bring the Polo Classic to life to more people? Can you see Budweiser taking you behind the plate at the World Series? Here the key is working around incredible experiences for the few that can be democratized in a branded way to the many.

For experience products, what about bringing your product to life? Imagine the feeling of flying in the first class suite on the A380, not as a small YouTube clip but as an immersive virtual reality experience. Why use thousands of words to explain the latest luxury hotel resort or a map to showcase the ski-trails of Aspen, when holiday

destinations and hotels can bring you a taste of what's possible? How can these experiences aid your choices of hotel room, or picking your seat on a plane, or selecting add-ons to your cruise. Rich customer experiences to drive sales and upsales are now possible.

Retailers have spent billions developing rich, tactile, luxurious physical stores and face huge rental and infrastructure costs in doing so, yet online commerce remains a customer management system with nice photos on top. VR allows companies to immerse customers in compelling brand retail experiences, while offering the immediacy and comfort of home. A clear win for all except mall owners.

The list is endless. Car companies offering test drives from home. Media owners offering far richer content than ever before, and in the process selling far more compelling advertising opportunities within them. But these ideas are just the tip of the iceberg. They are one-dimensional, linear interpolations of what we've made before but transported to the new screens of VR. When we developed radio, we first read out books. The first TV shows were filmed radio plays. As Marshall McLuhan said, "We march backwards into the future." The real shifts come when we think about brands and advertising in entirely new ways, when we apply technology at the core and ideate around this and new emerging behaviors. We need to think deeper. What does the role of advertising, brand and media become in this age? I certainly see a huge change and huge opportunities for brands, media owners, technology companies, but I'm blinded by the opportunities, not guided by the light. Virtual reality isn't just a new dimension to explore, it's literally a new world of opportunity; perhaps humanity's next and final land-grab. Whoever has the vision to see ahead could end up changing the world more than we'd ever expected, and reap the rewards. 

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