

Why PlayStation VR Will Dictate The Future Of Virtual Reality



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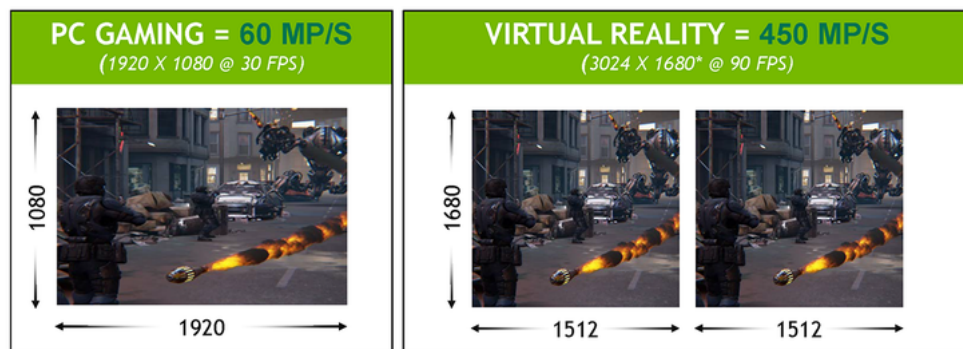
Virtual reality: the two words that made everybody growing up in the '90s dream of the future. Of course, we very temporarily had virtual reality, although we don't really talk about the Virtual Boy lest we cause seizures at the mention of its name. Of course, we believed that we had the dream of virtual reality realized in the form of the Oculus Rift, the first SDK being released in 2012 and only going from strength to strength thereon. With every new technology, however, comes people that believe that can do it better. Enter the new competitors to the throne of virtual reality supremacy: HTC Vive, appearing in collaboration with Valve, Google Cardboard, for those that really want to watch their YouTube videos with a shoddy piece of cardboard strapped to their eyes, Samsung Gear VR, Samsung's answer for Google's answer, and the PlayStation VR, recently announced as the first console-based virtual reality headset.

With all of these new technologies emerging, people are understandably getting excited about all of these new gizmos and gadgets seeing the light of day. What is fascinating is exactly who is excited. One would assume that, with the Oculus Rift maintaining a dominance over the concept for four years, the PC fanbase would be chomping at the bit to get a piece of that virtual reality pie. According to a survey done by Ipsos for GamesIndustry.biz (<http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2016-03-21-survey-playstation-xbox-gamers-more-interested-in-vr-than-pc-players>), this is not quite the case. According to this survey, 72% of PS4 and Xbox One players that responded to the poll are interested in virtual reality

tech, a comparatively sizable figure when paired with the 51% of PC gamers that are interested. On top of that, they are the sample group most excited about the technology, and that takes into account a net lack of interest across the odd ten thousand people surveyed. This begs the question: what is so compelling about a console exclusive virtual reality headset?

To begin, we need to unpack exactly what virtual reality entails: that is to say, a lot of hardware power. A standard VR headset – and let's just base this off of the pioneering Rift to save some time – requires a minimum of a nVidia GTX 970 or equivalent AMD graphics card, an Intel i5-4590 processor and 8GB of RAM. This is, in terms of the current ceiling of graphical capability, pretty high. Looking at it closer, however, tells you exactly why this technology needs so much power. A regular display will have an optimum output of 1080p at 30 frames per second, something that some PC players get antsy about but is nevertheless the yardstick of current games. A VR headset, by comparison, needs to run its displays at 90 frames per second, as frame drop is much more noticeable in the headset's display, and these displays must render two separate 1680 by 1512 pixel resolutions. Not even going into the syncing and the power needed to run the Rift itself, this maps out to roughly seven times more graphical grunt required to run than the current standard of any console, and even some PCs, right now.

IMMERSIVE VR EXPERIENCES ARE 7X MORE DEMANDING THAN PC GAMING



*VR render resolution

(./Why PlayStation VR Will Dictate

The Future Of Virtual Reality _ GamersFTW_files/nvidia-vr-performance_1280.0.png)

Running virtual reality is tough, and the barrier for entry is relatively high considering the nuclear reactor required to fuel this arcane tech. It is also interesting to note that, while the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One are graphically impressive, they have nothing on the graphical output of higher spec PC rigs that can stomach packing that much punch behind virtual reality. The question for Sony and Microsoft, then, is not when they can produce virtual reality headsets, but when. VR gaming needs the hardware that Sony and Microsoft could never muster before, especially not with their current generation offerings. It seems absurd, or perhaps even laughable, that any console in this generation would have an offering in this race of who has the biggest hardware muscles. Enter the PlayStation VR, and suddenly all bets are off. Yes, the PlayStation 4 has the processor and the RAM, but all hopes rested on the GPU; a fact that has been mocked frequently by the PC gaming community. If the PlayStation 4 can somehow manage to make a viable virtual reality headset, the ramifications of such a device are defining for the success of virtual reality technology. If the PlayStation VR manages to get their plane off the ground, they win the virtual reality race, and I say that knowing full well that numerous PC gaming enthusiasts are spending their life savings at the pitchfork emporium.

(<http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/wp->

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It has always been a sticking point that consoles have never been able to reach the dizzying heights of the PC juggernaut, but consoles have never really needed to: what they have always had, and continue to have even today, is accessibility. It is a simple numbers game. Steam's Hardware Survey (<http://store.steampowered.com/hwsurvey/video-card/>) lists the number of people using the nVidia GTX 970 at 4.55%. If we are to include equivocal or superior hardware, we can bump that number to around 10%, and being far more generous than we need to be, we can maybe place an extra 10% who don't use Steam as their primary form of gaming distribution or those that simply elected not to take the survey.

If every singly one of them were to purchase an HTC Vive or an Oculus Rift, and if we are to believe the current figure of roughly 125 million active users of Steam, the PC gaming community would be home to 25 million players playing on virtual reality. While this is impressive, it pales in comparison to what the PlayStation VR can offer, and it is a much simpler equation. According to reports from Polygon, the PS4 has surpassed 35.9 million sales. If every single person that can use PlayStation VR purchased one, the percent of people that could use it is 100%. There would be 35.9 million PS4 players with virtual reality headsets – a cool ten million people's worth of exposure more than the PC can muster.

Consoles have always been the proving grounds for gimmicks, and it is always a matter of accessibility. Everyone that owned a Wii could enjoy the motion controls that it presented, and it presented them well, so Wii sales skyrocketed. A similar thing is brewing for the PlayStation VR. Granted, it isn't bundled with the consoles yet, but imagine the reception and success it could have if they took the chance. The simple fact is that if you own a console, things that are released for that console are designed to work the moment you insert them, firmware or software updates notwithstanding. This is where consoles have always had the home team advantage, and why PC gaming has always been something of a big kids club despite being technologically one step ahead of the game. This is a point that Oculus have taken notice of; the minimum specs available on Oculus's website are conveniently sitting next to a host of VR capable computers ready to buy, starting at \$949USD, which is a step in the right direction. Yet even with that being said, the layman could not make a computer work by simply turning it on. It does not have the ease of use that consoles have come to enjoy. With this in mind, and if Sony's fingers are crossed tight enough, the PlayStation VR should simply plug in and present the glory of virtual reality to the wider gaming community. It is accessible enough to be taken notice of while showcasing exactly what virtual reality headsets have to offer – it is the perfect scenario for a new piece of technology breaking onto the scene.

(<http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/wp->

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Of course, we could be wrong, or at the very least slightly too hopeful for our own good. The PlayStation VR could well be a simple gimmick aiming to capitalize on the hype train that virtual reality represents. In the grand scheme of things, however, it doesn't really matter which way it swings, because the gaming community wins either way. If it emerges victorious, we may see consoles with higher hardware specs that can capitalize on the demands that the practice imposes, and console gaming could enjoy a technological renaissance. If it goes the way of motion controls, then it will simply act as a catalyst for Sony to try harder, or for players to try their hand at PC virtual reality, and allow it to sufficiently blow their minds. Either way, virtual reality wins. With the PlayStation VR acting as a cost-efficient means to test the waters of this new frontier, it would not be a stretch to suggest that, even if it bombs spectacularly, the PlayStation VR could usher in a new paradigm for video games.

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