Virtual Reality News Fatigue

When you write for a blog focused on 3D & VFX, you're going to learn a lot about VR. I'm starting to tire of the speculation. I am ready for results. [My first article](#) on the subject wasn't all that positive. Slowly, I've come around to finding value in VR. Of course, I think we're still stuck in this hype loop. There's lots of demos and stories about *upcoming* VR experiences, but it hasn't really saturated the consumer market yet. Many products & technologies that were supposed to revolutionize our world have come and gone (including virtual reality the first time). Is our future going to be filled with virtual reality or is that an alternate reality dream? I don't know. I just have virtual reality news fatigue.

I don't need to tell you about all the amazing things possible in VR. You'll see that on your grandmother's 24 hour news channel & in your social feed every 2 hours. Development is happening in games, broadcast video, education & health services. Like video games, virtual reality is available for expensive hardware or a mobile phone. Well, who am I kidding? Phones are incredibly expensive, but carriers hide the actual prices with subsidies. Samsung's GearVR or Google's Cardboard will work with many different cell phones while the other end of the spectrum has the HTC Vive, Oculus and Microsoft's HoloLens.

Awkward Segue

I hope you're not reading this while driving your [Segway](#) down the sidewalk. I would hate for you to run into someone wearing Google Glass because you weren't paying attention. Oh wait, neither of those technologies revolutionized the world and became indespensible. How's that paperless office you work in? That one is not a realized dream either.

In recent years, there have been a lot of prophecies from the tech journalists. Instead of linking to some, how about I just drop a QR code in the middle of this paragraph. That works for you, right? Yeah, nobody uses QR codes, despite how hard marketing companies tried. Apple Pay and wallet apps on mobile devices using NFC should have destroyed credit cards by now. Everyone has a cell phone, right? So, why don't those technologies rule the financial world like the 6 o'clock news said they would? Is it because bitcoin has become the standard?

Before you 3D print a duplicate of your middle finger to send me, I'm not wishing the failure of VR. I'm very happy to watch it evolve into something useful. I would love if the tech blog stories of 3D printing clothes and household items at the click of a button were true. Unfortunately, it hasn't happened *yet*.

Journalists & the blogosphere love new technology because people enjoy learning about *the future.* The Segway & Google Glass aren't exactly failures, but when they debuted the media proclaimed that tech to be the future. If you look at video game consoles, the Wii was also short-lived instead of a revolution. It was big. So big, that Sony and Microsoft had to compete with Move & Kinect. Though, the trend died fairly quickly. The control with these devices was limited, thus making the games fairly simple. You could say that these technologies were a stepping stone to the VR we have today.

"Yes, but VR is different. Just because you argue that other technology failed to be adapted completely proves nothing about the sucess of virtual reality!"

My point is that there is always hype. We need to get on the other side of the hype and look at it objectively.

The VR Train(ing) Never Left

The late 80s and early 90s gave us virtual reality, but it wasn't cost effective and had even more bulky hardware than we have today, if you can believe it. As I covered before, VR has been in therapeutic use for many years. The military has used simulators to train soldiers on the operation of vehicles and equipment for a very long time. Some of those units were purchased for $800,000 back in 2007. Similar to 3D printing, VR has finally come down in cost and we're seeing it move further down to consumers.

Recently, I read an article from Hammer and Tusk called "Can VR Help Stop Police Shootings," in which they make a very good argument for using VR in officer training. My only concern is using Oculus or Cardboard instead of a simulator. Financially, it is a win, but one of the reasons why simulators work is because the military makes the experience as realistic as possible. In other words, they recreate the cockpits and the controls in the physical world. After enough simulator time, everything is muscle memory when a soldier is sitting in the actual vehicle. I don't think a consumer headset alone, would be as effective.

The Hammer and Tusk article states that the technology isn't there yet, but I still believe a straight up simulation is different than putting on a headset. In both cases, you're still using your willing suspension of disbelief. That's just a fancy way to say "pretend." When you go see a play or a film, you tell your brain to forget that any acting is happening. When we interact with VR, we have to do the same thing. Yet, the tactile interactive pieces in a simulation makes suspending your disbelief easier. Without the realistic tactile controls, you're just wearing a sweaty headset and playing a game.

In order to increase the realism in VR, that means users would need additional gear. You've seen the walking pods/treadmills, but eventually we're going to need some gloves or clothes to provide more sensations. Are you willing to change your wardrobe to try a round of VR golf in your living room? That same argument is present with my dream of *Star Trek* holodeck-like AR. Will it be enjoyable or useful minus the *tactile* interactivity? If consumers think not, VR will not change the world.

The Fragmented Reality of Now

As I spew opinion at you, I'm looking at the current consumer offerings and the differences could really be an issue. My first impression of VR was very low because I tried it on Google's first Cardboard. When I got my head in an Oculus, it was a completely different experience. First impressions are everything. VR could crash and burn in the everyday use case if our experience with it is lackluster.

Now, Android has been successful despite being a fragmented market. There's a ton of Android phones, but each manufacturer or carrier has added their own tweaks to the open source software. A bad implementation of Android can send users running to Apple. Most likely the success of Android is the number of options and the price point. Perhaps the so-so phone-VR applications will dominate and leave Oculus in the dust?

Realistically, VR could be "the next thing," it could be fragmented like games on console/PC/mobile or it could be 3D printing. 3D printing has carved out a small market, but the average consumer thinks "plastic trinkets" when they see the technology. VR could lose its second chance in entertainment and stay prominent in its own space of training & therapy. Perhaps the question comes down to how much you have to wear? I know, I'm obsessed with that, right?

"Time to put on your VR pajamas. The game is about to start."

So, will people be willing to wear a headset just to sit down and watch a football game? I [said before](#) VR's biggest opportunity to get us average Joes is through broadcast. I might put on my favorite player's jersey, but I'm not going to dress up like [Andy Serkis](#) just to watch the game.

Stop The Presses

It truly is exciting to see the ideas that people are thinking up in the VR space, but there seems to be very little tangible results. The tech sites, newly started VR blogs and the game review pages are all over virtual reality, hungry for your clicks. Like with all the comic book hero films, I'm starting to get burned out on VR news. We need a market success to move this field forward before we get bored of it like Candy Crush or flip phones. Or, realistically something better could come along. Did you know a company poured millions into launching a few satellites in order to start a sat-phone network only to go out of business when cell phones came to market?

I hope you don't think I was being too negative. I want you to have your VR, I really do. I'd hate for you to live your lives like me, waiting for something that never becomes a reality. And with that note, I'll leave you so I can go sit in a corner and cry about missing out on my flying car and personal jet pack.