

The move towards virtual, augmented reality and gamification becoming increasingly effective in brands' story telling



Yaw Dwomoh
CEO of Idea Hive

Our first experiences define us: The first kiss, our first day at school, the first broken arm, baby's first smile and that first broken heart. Whether bitter or sweet, first experiences are what make us who we are and set the example against which we measure all our life experiences. Experiential marketing has come a long way from traders in roadside markets offering passersby samples of their produce and goods. Using Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and Gamification, we are able to create multi-sensory experiences that evoke those same powerful emotions that make us essentially human.

The technological revolution and the Covid-19 digital disruption has injected new life into old. The New York Times has done this well, adding an array of tech-related companies to their publishing platform that make the best use of their biggest asset – telling great stories. On their website, you can find a collection of immersive storytelling features, including AR and VR experiences. In their quest to modernise, they have positioned themselves as the overwhelming authority on all things tech, stepping out of their traditional publishing grave clothes and into the future.



Thanks to a reduction in the cost of hardware and software as the years go on, and an increase in local skills, South Africa is now more than capable of providing immersive and interactive digital experiences with quantifiable results, which ultimately creates the love for a brand.

Think, for example, of buying your first car. What went through your mind? Maybe the sweat and tears that went into paying for it? Or the leather interior you had mapped out in the back of a schoolbook years ago?



Recently Volkswagen partnered with New Reality to create a 'demo' experience their customers won't forget. Prospective buyers were able to check out and test-drive the new Polo SUV (the T-Cross) before it was released months before it could be physically test-driven in South Africa. Customers were able to play with interiors and features and even order their vehicle all using VR.

"Virtual and augmented reality and gamification is effective when it takes the customer on a journey they never expected. In fact, it's when brands find a way to become a part of the customer's life journey like first cars, having a baby or choosing your next renovation project – that brand love is born. It allows us to overlay a digital lens onto the real world," says Yaw Dwomoh, CEO of Idea Hive, a digital storytelling specialist agency in Johannesburg.

Traditional advertising does an excellent job at providing awareness at its different touchpoints, but in some ways it tells the consumer how to feel and keeps them passive. Creating moments of immersion builds experiences that what will leave the customer changed forever and elicits emotion that money can't buy.

Coupled with clever activations, the technology available to us is able to activate every one of the senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste. And depending on the mode of immersion used, the experiences can be directed at 100 or 100 000.



Examples of experiences created using VR, AR or gamification that worked

Martin Garrix puts on a music show for the deaf community

Tactile audio systems and Projectors

In 2016, Dutch DJ Martin Garrix partnered with 7 Up to host an extrasensory concert for the deaf community. The resulting 'Music Lifts You Up' video premiered during Ultra Fest in Miami and received viral media coverage.

Together with immersive experience artists, Fake Love, they incorporated motion, vibration and stunning visuals to help the concert-goers 'feel' and 'see' the music. With walls of speakers, LEDs boxes of water that moved with the music, platforms

to stand on that vibrated to the beat, and even a special backpack that vibrated the sound right through their chests, his guests were euphorically happy.

What did 7 Up get out of it? A phenomenal amount of brand capital, but a moving comment from one of the attendees says it all, "It really was the best night of my life."

The 7 Up gig taught us that the experience doesn't need to have anything to do with your actual product. Communicating the personality or character of your brand can be enough to create magic.

Glenlivet tests the palates of whisky connoisseurs

Gamification and AR

AR-enabled product packaging can double as a brand's owned media channel speaking directly to their consumer. In 2018, would-be whisky connoisseurs jumped at the Glenlivet augmented reality whisky-tasting experience in partnership with Shazam.

When customers opened the app, master distiller Alan Winchester came to life, challenging users to mini-games to identify and isolate ingredients by selecting the four aromas for the nose and flavours of the whisky. He also engaged and immersed them in the mysterious back-story behind Glenlivet's distinctive taste. Tasters were given a score which they could share to social media.

Because of the extra value offered to customers post-purchase, they upped the brand loyalty and reached a completely new demographic to boot.

Samsung and NASA Moon Walk

VR and 4D

The experience, titled 'A Moon for All Mankind', opened to the New York public in July 2018 through to July 2019, – in honour of the big 50th anniversary celebration of the moonlanding in 1969.

An extensive support rig and flight suit supported participants, while attached onto a load-bearing system similar to the Active Response Gravity Offload System



used at the Johnson Space Center in Houston to train real astronauts. Wearing a helmet with Samsung's Gear VR goggles, users went on a mission to explore the moon surface and plant their own flag.

The experience combined tech, awe and an emotionally charged moment in history to create an unforgettable experience for those who tried it and plenty of the right coverage.

Merryl Trailscape experience

VR and Motion capture and Tactile elements

Merrell created a VR experience called Trailscape to launch its newest hiking boot, the Capra. Participants could walk (carefully) along a stage set that simulated a mountainous trail, mapped to the virtual experience to create a new level of immersion.

Tactile elements such as rope walkways and shaking wooden planks, while motion capture allowed adventurers to explore the mountainside. Merryl created such a powerful immersive experience that it was showcased at the Sundance Film Festival.

Dwomoh, says, "The brands that inspire us, tell stories we can relate to. The brands we love and remember tell stories that cast us as the main character. Using technology, we can create unforgettable experiences and bring customers on board as co-creators. It's an exciting time to be a digital marketing agency." **SR**