

# VR will reshape our entertainment experiences

 By Ernst Wittmann

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Virtual Reality (VR) has a long way to go before it bursts into the mainstream, but there are signs that the technology is starting to mature. Growth is ramping up and exciting applications from gaming to e-learning to media are starting to come to the fore.



In fact, Research & Markets forecasts that VR headset sales will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 41% for the next five years, becoming a \$38.7 billion market by 2024.

The research forecasts that the smartphone-enabled virtual reality headset will remain the largest segment.

“Within the global virtual reality headset market, gaming & entertainment will remain the largest application, due to the growth of the gaming industry and increasing development of VR specific games by various gaming enterprises,” says the report.

Here are ways that virtual reality will reshape our entertainment experience in the next five years:

- **Gaming**

Gaming and game developers remain at the forefront of the VR revolution and there is a growing selection of titles to choose from – immersive simulators, frenetic shooters, puzzle games, heart-stopping horror games, and more besides. While many of these genres build on gaming’s traditional foundations, others are more experimental and offer unique experiences.

The exciting potential lies in the way the immersion of the medium, paired with more accessible controllers, could make gaming more interesting to the audience that was not engaged in it before. Google Cardboard – though not available in South Africa yet – makes it easy to jump into VR gaming from your Android smartphone with a simple cardboard viewer.

- **Music**

In an era when fans expect more access to the stars because of their engagement on social media, VR could add a new dimension to the music. For example, musicians could record their shows to offer a virtual concert experience where the audience not only feels what it is like to be part of the crowd at the stadium but also to be on the stage with the performers or hang out backstage with their idols. Bands could even offer VR concerts for a global audience via streaming.

- **Cinema and television**

Television and film production companies have been experimenting with VR for years, and some big-name directors like Kathryn Bigelow, Ridley Scott and Robert Rodriguez are interested in the medium. Netflix has even released a basic VR app for Android, though it doesn't yet have any VR-specific content. IMAX, meanwhile, opened a few VR arcades around the world and shut them down in less than three years.

This indicates that there is plenty of interest in VR as a cinematic medium, yet there is still a long way to go before it becomes accepted. Creators need to come to grips with the technology, perhaps developing a new visual language and new ways to tell stories to make VR films work. They may need to accept interactivity as part of the experience, blurring the lines between film and games.

VR in cinema has so far been a story of big ambitions and significant failures. But it's worth remembering that 3D movies had a long history before the technology matured and they became widely accepted as part of the cinema experience, particularly for special effects-driven blockbusters.

We could imagine a similar scenario unfolding for VR. Perhaps VR won't take over in every genre, but one could imagine its potential for certain types of content. Imagine, for example, a documentary about astronomy that turns your VR headset into your own little planetarium. Or a wildlife documentary that gets you up close and personal with the animals.

- **Virtual tourism and extreme experiences**

One of the most exciting possibilities that VR will offer us in the future is the ability to step into experiences and environments that might be too dangerous or too expensive in real life. VR could, for example, immerse you in a shark tank, let you climb to the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, allow you to browse the art in the Louvre, or put you at the controls of a space shuttle.

We're already seeing some examples of this category take off – a handful of theme parks around the world already offer VR rides, while one of the most popular VR applications in the world is VR Thrills: Roller Coaster 360 for Android. Google's Expeditions, meanwhile, offers field trips to hundreds of natural and historical landmarks around the world.

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