

# Virtual audience engagement is easier than you'd imagine

 By [Sandra Roberts](#)

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Audiences, who have limited time and attention increasingly crave real engagement with content. Journalists and communicators alike are considering the uses of virtual reality (VR) and 360 tools to make stories come alive and give people experiences they would otherwise not have.



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VR can bring together some key characteristics of great content, in that it can be driven by stories, promotes engagement, it is flexible and users can choose their experience, it is sharable and it can even include gaming in the VR world. But it doesn't have to. VR is great for serious content. Using the principles of good journalism, VR (or at least its cousin, 360) can be cobbled together quite cheaply.

Should you be using VR? It has some great advantages for communications and storytelling.

## 1. It is personal

Even more than films and documentaries, VR puts you into the shoes of the characters. Great story telling should transplant you from your life and into someone else's, you can see perspectives that you hadn't before. VR puts a human face on news, this human face is yours. What is it like to be in a warzone?

Awaiting asylum papers? You can experience all these. Closer to home, you can understand someone you may know. What is it like to be autistic? *The Guardian* gives you the experience of autism (with or without a headset).

## 2. It is emotionally engaging

VR can fill you with wonder or terror, almost any emotional experience. Some VR experiences of space remind me of the awe I used to feel going to the planetarium as a child, but it is far closer and more personal. The visuals and sounds can have you crashing into planets and staring up into virtual skies. Various apps and nytvr offer explorations of space.



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## 3. It is absorptive

How well do you know your news? [Al Jazeera](#) used 360 from Google Maps street view for a survey. You sign up to go on a journey to cities around the world, move through the city while you try figure out where you've landed and guess where it is.

## 4. It is beautiful

Human brains like beauty, it gives us pleasure and complicated reactions that scientists are just uncovering. The impact of beauty on our brains is now a real scientific field, termed neuroaesthetics. VR can help you see the whole world like an artist or musician does, heightening your appreciation for beauty, not only during, but after the experience.

All these experiences are accessible through VR in a few minutes. All these pose, or will pose, challenges for journalists and communicators in terms of changing audience expectations.

### ABOUT SANDRA ROBERTS

Sandra is a experienced media and social researcher, with her D litt et Phil in Sociology. She is increasingly interested in how to solve issues related to the the converged media environment. She is Academic/ Research Head at frayintermedia.

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