

Net#work BBDO and Sinister Studio create wonder with virtual reality

 By Pasqua Heard

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Inspired by the imagination of children, Net#work BBDO and visual effects and animation agency Sinister Studio applied technology to advertising to create a virtual reality (VR) campaign for Mercedes-Benz South Africa showcasing the new Mercedes-Benz Roadster and Cabriolet driving through magical landscapes.

The agencies' objective was to make the Mercedes' global #LookUp campaign a more immersive experience. They achieved this by showing from a child's perspective what it feels like to sit in the new C-Class Cabriolet.



Brad Reilly, Net#work BBDO's ECD, explains the inspiration for the campaign: "The insight that as children we look at the world with wonder, but as we grow up and become weighed down with 'life stuff', that wonder diminishes, was at the heart of the campaign. We wanted to demonstrate how a Mercedes-Benz cabriolet is able to reawaken that wonder. So, we put a few kids (the wonder experts) in the car and asked them to describe the experience. We then took what they told us and translated that into a fully-immersive VR experience that put people into their world of wonder and imagination to create a test drive like no other."

In his discussion of the design process on this piece, Reilly says, "The entire world is created in CG [computer graphics] – the car, the characters and the journey are all animated and plotted onto a 360° wireframe world, where no matter which direction you look, it appears at the correct angle in the correct perspective. It's a massively complex job that our partners at Sinister Studio spent months perfecting and it literally takes weeks to render this world."

According to Reilly, this is the best-performing VR/360° video in South Africa to date, with over 1m YouTube views and 600K Facebook views.

The benefits of using VR in advertising

Here, Reilly discusses in detail the difference between augmented reality (AR) and VR and their contribution to the future of advertising.

▣ What role does VR currently play in advertising, and what trends do you predict between VR and advertising in the future?

VR offers brands the opportunity to create more immersive experiences for their customers and prospective buyers. This is set to become more and more immersive. The current reality of VR is that you can look, but you can't touch. As the tech progresses a user will be able to navigate, not just get taken along for the ride, and even be able to interact with objects within the film. That line between what's real and what's not will get blurrier and the suspension of disbelief will become that much more powerful.

▣ How does AR in advertising differ from VR?

AR is the integration of an experience or a layer onto an existing environment vs the stepping into a whole new world that VR offers. AR is definitely the next wave, even though it's been splashed around for a fair amount of time and we saw quite a bit of it a few years back in the guise of activated QR codes. It has become far more advanced although still in its relative infancy. It's being used more and more in hands-on practical training – a med student working on an actual cadaver or an engineer working on an actual piece of machinery where different annotations, notes or images appear within that real subject matter. And then there was Pokemon GO (remember that?), which was a pretty good example of laying fantasy over reality. I think the big step for both technologies is getting the experience off of the phone and into the eye to create less of a barrier between our reality and the augmented or virtual one at scale, of course – very few people I know are walking around with VR headsets today. It's only the beginning.

▣ Can we expect more VR campaigns from Network BBDO in the future?

This is actually our third VR film for Mercedes-Benz and they have launched a VR app, so there will likely be more, but they are all about innovation in every sphere of the business, so keep your eyes and ears peeled for even newer things (which I can't really talk about now) to start showing up in their marketing mix.

ABOUT PASQUA HEARD

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