

Media & Marketing



Conor Brophy While advertisers would be foolish to ignore the potential of VR headsets, the reality is that immersive pop-ups could move consumers to opt out of ad content

When was the last time you saw an advertisement that really moved you? Not moved in the sense of holding back tears at the John Lewis Christmas spot. In the era of mass market availability of virtual reality headsets, we're talking actual physical movement or, at least, the sensation of same.

To coin a phrase from a simpler, pre-VR age of advertising: here comes the science. It's called galvanic vestibular stimulation.

Samsung, which is betting large on virtual becoming an actual reality for millions of consumers, has just debuted new headphones that deliver messages to nerve endings in the ear. Specifically, they target the vestibular system, responsible for helping us balance, thus fooling the brain into think-

ing the body is moving.

The headphones may also help with one of the persistent issues attached to VR headsets which is that some users experience a form of motion sickness. Inducing the sensation of movement to go with the virtual reality experience should alleviate that.

Entrim 4D, as the prototype headphones are currently known, is envisaged as an accessory to Samsung's Gear VR headset. Gear and Entrim made a big impression at the SXSW festival in Austin, Texas, with many of the tech hacks in attendance certainly moved to write glowing reviews of the headset and headphone VR combo.

It was notable at SXSW, though, that a lot of emphasis was being placed on the potential of VR to deliver the next generation of advertising. Among the demos on offer to attendees was the "virtual Happy Meal" at the McDonald's Loft beside the main convention centre in Austin.

If VR headsets do, as is widely predicted, become standard issue for the smartphone generation, advertisers would be foolish to ignore the obvious potential. Virtual test-drives, flights and tours could be powerful tools to promote everything from vehicles to hotels. The entertainment industry is also understandably excited by the prospect of more immersive content (which may also be much harder to pirate).

Los Angeles-based Immersv has just launched its mobile virtual reality platform. In testing, it reported a completion rate, the proportion of its ads which users watch to their conclusion, of 79 per cent. Immersv says that compares very favourably with the stats for traditional video ads. It cites figures from one video ad platform, Vindico, showing completion rates of 46 per cent for smartphones and 54 per cent for tablet users.

That figure, however, is a somewhat



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selective quotation from Vindico's 2014 annual report. When Vindico excludes skippable ads on YouTube which, funnily enough, most users will tend to skip when given the option, completion rates for streaming video ads were 78 per cent. That was up from 76 per cent in 2013.

Signs are that video ads are becoming shorter, more targeted and better at engaging and retaining attention. So it may be brave to assume that VR ads will revolutionise the medium at this early stage.

Besides, if given a choice, will users allow themselves to be fully immersed in VR advertising or will they want to skip it? Nick Statt, a writer for technology site The Verge, described the McDonald's experience at SXSW as "the capitalist dystopian side of VR where the only limit is how many logos your eyes can take in at once".

Great content may be even better in VR but annoying content will be

even more off-putting. Imagine the VR equivalent of banner ads or pop-ups. Picture racing through the streets of Monaco in a next-generation Formula One racing game or taking a virtual seat in the front row at New York fashion week enabled by your Samsung Gear headset only to find the illusion of "being there" broken by a poorly timed ad for toilet cleaner (however immersive and accurately rendered).

While brands may be enthused about the scope the new innovations offer to improve the advertising experience, many consumers clearly still find the best experience of all to be one that is either entirely, or mostly, ad-free. They may well seek out whatever the VR equivalent of ad-blocking software will be to ensure commercial reality doesn't impinge on their virtual world.

That's assuming, of course, VR takes off to the extent that advertisers even have to address these issues. It's not that long ago that 3D television was being hyped at events such as SXSW. Sample quote from 2009: "If you hadn't noticed, 3D is going to be big in 2010." It wasn't then and it isn't now.

Samsung, Facebook – with its Oculus Rift headset – and others have spent billions to make VR a success and add the wow factor that 3D TV lacked. At the same time, they well know that the line between successful gadget and forgotten gimmick (Google Glass, anyone?) is a fine one but a real one.

Safety first, social duty a close second at ESB



Colette Sexton

When you visit the ESB headquarters on Dublin's

Fitzwilliam Street, you are asked to sign in, given a little card with instructions on how to evacuate the building, and then directed to watch a safety video, which, among other things, advises to hold the rail at all times when using the stairs.

Past reception, there is an electric sign boasting that it has been 250 days since the last mishap befell someone on the stairs.

Asked about this unusual level of concern for safety, ESB chief executive Pat O'Doherty said it was very important to the organisation to ensure that its workforce was aware of health and safety in all activities, from working on electricity lines to carrying a cup of coffee upstairs.

With 7,000 employees, ESB needs to be aware of staff retention. Safety issues apart, this is also why ESB encourages staff to play a large part in its corporate social responsibility programme, through which it donates over €2 million annually.

"We've always been anchored in communities. ESB touches every community in the country, our staff are drawn from those communities. About ten years ago, we set about funding our CSR differently. We went to our staff, and they suggested investing in homelessness and suicide prevention," O'Doherty said.

ESB has donated over €5 million



Pat O'Doherty, ESB chief executive

Feargal Ward

to suicide prevention services over the past ten years. Recently, it has also added educational disadvantage as a priority.

While the ESB invests money, its staff are also encouraged to volunteer, do their own fundraising, and share their skills.

Its CSR funding comprises €1 million annually in direct funding through the Energy for Generations fund, which is spent on community and issues-based initiatives.

A further €1 million is invested

annually through support for Electric Aid, which is the ESB staff social justice fund, staff volunteering, in-kind support and sponsorship with a CSR dimension.

Staff who volunteer at least 20 hours of their own time per year in their own communities can apply for funding of up to €250 for their chosen registered charity.

The retail arm of the ESB was re-named Electric Ireland in 2012, and O'Doherty said it has done a lot of work to avoid confusion since the

name change.

"The regulator has determined that ESB's retail arm should be separate, which is why we had to rebrand the sales arm to Electric Ireland," he said.

"We had to do it. It wasn't something that we particularly wanted to do and we'd prefer if we didn't have to do it."

But the public seems to be getting used to the name change. In December, an IPSOS MRBI survey, commissioned by ESB, asked respondents "What organisations come to mind which provide electricity?" Some 67

per cent of respondents said Electric Ireland, with 57 per cent saying ESB.

One of the ways it has divided the brands is in terms of sponsorships. The ESB focuses on corporate and philanthropic sponsorships, like Tree Week, which is a weeklong programme of events organised by the National Tree Council and the Feis Ceoil Festival. Electric Ireland holds commercial sponsorships, like Pieta House's Darkness into Light, Team Ireland at the Olympics, and the All-Ireland Minor Championships.

Inside Track



Sharon Horgan is on a commissioning roll

Laughing all the way: writer Horgan hits big time

It's been a busy time for Sharon Horgan. The Irish writer has been commissioned to co-write a comedy pilot called *The Circuit* for Channel 4. The show will star Irish actress Eva Birthistle as one of the leads. It is not the first show Horgan has worked on for the channel. Her comedy *Catastrophe* aired its second season last year.

Meanwhile, another show written by Horgan, this time with Graham Linehan of *Father Ted* fame, was announced by BBC as part of its new comedy season earlier this month.

Horgan created and produced *Divorce* for HBO, which stars Sarah Jessica Parker from *Sex and The City*, and will air this year.

New appointments

Dublin-based below the line marketing agency Runway Marketing has appointed Louise Leonard as its new managing director. Its founder Dee Colgan will work alongside Leonard. Previously, Leonard worked in Irish International Proximity, The Printed Image and DIT. Runway Marketing is a member of the TPI Group.

Meanwhile, Jillian Keogh has been appointed as account manager in H and A Marketing and PR. Most recently, she worked for Ideas Shop, a corporate communications agency in New Zealand.



Minister Damien English with winner Emma Flanagan

Young writers shine at NewsBrands Awards

Talented young writers have been honoured as part of a prestigious competition designed to keep the next generation reading newspapers.

Delighted Emma Flanagan, from Our Lady's College, Drogheda, Co Louth, was all smiles as she picked up the overall winner prize at the NewsBrands Ireland Press Pass awards earlier this week.

She was one of 7,500 transition year students who took part in this year's newspapers-in-education programme which uses print media to help improve students' reading and writing.

In an age when young people have become accustomed to the convenience and concision of texting and tweeting, newspapers can play a crucial role in improving their critical thinking skills that will benefit

them throughout their life. This was the fourth year of the worthwhile initiative which saw trophies presented by Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation, Damien English, in five other categories: Features, Opinion, News, Sport and Photojournalism.

NewsBrands Ireland chairman, Vincent Crowley, said: "Once again this year's entries are of an exceptional standard and what's really coming through is a sense of enjoyment and love of words."

The winners were chosen by a panel of newspaper editors and journalists, including *Sunday Business Post* Digital Editor James McNamara, and chaired by former Press Ombudsman Professor John Horgan.

You can read Emma Flanagan's winning entry, 'The Politics of Apathy', at business post.ie

Big spend on hoardings is sign of the times

BY JACK HORGAN-JONES
BUSINESS
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Property companies are spending tens of thousands of euro on lavish hoardings for their flagship projects as competition reaches fever pitch, industry experts have said.

The spending spree is leading to record profits for the sign-makers as developers seek to out do each other in a newly competitive market place.

Jeff Martin, owner of sign-maker Big Picture Media, said that his company is on track for a record year, thanks largely to the elaborate bespoke hoarding designs that

are becoming commonplace around Dublin and other large cities. "Over the past year, and particularly in the last six months, there has been a massive increase in demand. The emergence of a number of high quality jobs in Dublin city centre has resulted in competing companies raising the bar when it comes to how their projects are being presented to the public and prospective tenants or buyers," he said.

With larger, more high-profile jobs coming with price-tags of up to €100,000 or more, it's providing a welcome cash injection for the makers of the flashy hoardings.

"After such a long period of stagnation and virtually no construction work happening in the city, many de-



Big Picture Media specialises in construction billboards and advertising hoarding. The billboards do double duty by serving to mask sites during construction projects

velopers want to make a big statement of intent with their projects," Martin said. "[The billboards] serve to clean up the site during construction and also serve as a highly effective element of their marketing campaign," Martin said.

Big Picture Media has started taking on staff once again. It is currently working on a range of high-profile projects, including the giant banners on the front of the Siptu headquarters at Liberty Hall in Dublin. "While the construction industry provides a large percentage of our income, we have been building up strong relationships with clients across various industries since 2001, many of which were not as badly affected by the downturn," Martin said.