



Virtual reality in theme park rides

ACTIVITIES

1 Read the text and choose the correct heading for each paragraph.

- A The remaining issues of VR technology in other attractions
- B The reasons why it is still not largely used in parks
- C Two examples of successful VR experiences in parks
- D The first Virtual Reality experiences in amusement and theme parks
- E An attempt to address one of VR major problems
- F The drawbacks of VR in roller coasters

1
 Long before the term was even coined, amusement parks and theme parks were offering virtual reality experiences. They had nothing to do with VR headsets or computer-generated imagery of course, but 'scenic railways', slow-moving roller coasters that crudely simulated excursions to faraway places by incorporating painted murals along the route, were popular at parks more than 100 years ago. They were followed by 'dark rides', which moved passengers in vehicles through indoor show buildings that displayed scenes (often meant to startle and scare riders).

2
 Through the years, the Disney parks and others have introduced animatronics, projected imagery, ride vehicles on robotic arms, and other trickery to transport guests to alternate realities. Actual virtual reality technology has been around for a while, but parks have only embraced it over the last few years. The results have been mixed. VR has mostly been used as an overlay on existing rides. Due to limitations in factors such as image quality, gear portability, and glitchy performance, it remains largely a novelty at parks. Attraction designers recognize the enormous potential that the concept holds, however, and are working to overcome its failings.

3
 Among the first rides to feature VR were roller coasters at SeaWorld Orlando, Cedar Point in Ohio, a number of Six Flags locations, and other parks. The amount of time and extra staff it takes to get passengers into and out of the headsets cuts deeply into ride capacity, makes lines much longer, and costs extra to operate. The visuals sometimes do not sync properly with the ride, making passengers queasy. For these and other reasons, only a few VR coaster experiences remain.

4
 Parks have added VR to other existing attractions, including drop towers and spinning rides. But the issues that make the technology problematic often remain. In addition to capacity and balky performance, these include

low-resolution imagery and cartoony content that can look more like a cut-rate video game than a real-life environment as well as clunky headsets that can take riders out of the story by calling attention to themselves. Also, regardless of the type of ride, VR turns what should be a shared, social experience into an isolated, solo one.

5
 Busch Gardens Williamsburg in Virginia tried something different by transforming its motion simulator theatre into 'Battle for Eire'. It attempted to address one major VR ride issue, the amount of time it takes to cycle guests in and out of the attraction, by developing intriguing two-part headsets. Before they get in the theatre, riders put on and adjust masks that have already been cleaned. When they sit in the seats, guests pop on VR goggles, which quickly and easily attach to the masks using magnets. A motion simulator ride places passengers on a base and moves them in concert with projected action on screens. The VR headsets give passengers a 360-degree perspective.

6
 The challenge with many VR rides, according to David Schaefer, who helped to create Battle for Eire, is that they were not developed with the technology operational requirements from the get-go. However, some bespoke attractions have already surfaced in parks: instead of adding VR to a ride, there are walk-through, free-roaming VR experiences such as VR Showdown In Ghost Town, California. The extra-fee attraction arms participants with blasters to shoot at robotic villains and score points in a retro-futuristic Western village. It is like being immersed inside a video game. Perhaps the state-of-the-art in theme park VR attractions is "Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire," a separate-admission experience offered by The Void at the Disney resorts in both California and Florida. By using dimensional set pieces that participants can touch, making it possible for participants to talk and engage with one another, adding multisensory enhancements, and rendering visuals that really pop.

Adapted from *Virtual reality: VR tech added to theme park rides*, *Usa Today*



2 Read the text again and decide if the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Scenic railways moved passengers in vehicles through indoor show buildings that displayed scenes. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 Parks have only embraced VR over the last few years but virtual reality technology has been around for a while. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |
| 3 Few parks use VR because of issues like image quality, gear portability and glitchy performance. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 Lines at roller coasters are long because passengers have to get into and out of the headsets. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |
| 5 Parks have introduced new custom-made VR for attractions, including drop towers and spinning rides. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |
| 6 Headsets can distract riders from the ride or isolate them from the others. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |
| 7 In a Californian park, two-part headsets reduce the time to cycle guests in and out of the attraction. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |
| 8 Most of the VR rides were developed with the technology operational requirements from the very beginning. | T <input type="radio"/> | F <input type="radio"/> |

3 Match each word with its definition.

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1 Crudely | A A graphical computer display which can be superimposed on another |
| 2 Faraway | B A usually slight or insignificant defect |
| 3 To startle | C Causing uneasiness |
| 4 Trickery | D Artifice, act intended to cheat |
| 5 Overlay | E Custom-made |
| 6 Gear | F In a rudimentary way |
| 7 Glitchy | G Prone to a minor malfunction |
| 8 Failing | H Distant in time and space |
| 9 Queasy | I Clumsy in style, form, or execution |
| 10 Balky | J Equipment or apparatus that is used for a particular purpose |
| 11 Clunky | K To cause to feel sudden shock, to frighten |
| 12 To pop on | L To put on quickly |
| 13 Get-go | M Refusing or likely to refuse to proceed, act, or function as directed or expected |
| 14 Bespoke | N The very beginning |

4 Compare the different uses of VR in amusement and theme parks and describe them in a short paragraph.

