



OPINION AND INSIGHT

A Year in VR: Does 2017 Hold More Rapid Evolution for the Medium?

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Employees from POSSIBLE, Team One, MPC Creative and more ponder what the year ahead has in store for virtual reality



2016 saw virtual reality enter a phase of hyper evolution. The boundaries of technology and creativity were constantly pushed with each new project presenting wholly new challenges to be solved. New headsets, like PlayStation VR, also entered the marketplace and attempted to bring the technology to a wider audience. So what's really changed in the world of VR over the past 12 months? Has it reached its potential? Is it entering the mainstream now? And what developments will we see in 2017?

LBB's Addison Capper chatted with employees from POSSIBLE, Team One, Grand Central Recording Studios, MPC Creative, and Guns or Knives to pick their brains...

Steve Lane, Sound Designer, Grand Central Recording Studios

VR has reached fever pitch in the last year, but I have a feeling we've only just started and 2017 will see huge change. For me, the immersive quality of VR is most interesting so I think there will be a big emphasis on binaural and spatial audio capabilities. A convincing VR experience absolutely depends on authentic audio. Speaking as a passionate advocate for the power of audio, I couldn't agree more with chief scientist at Oculus, Michael Abrash, when addressing the importance of sound in VR: "It's not an addition - it's a multiplier".

As VR and 360 video becomes increasingly prevalent in our day-to-day life, we need to ensure that the audio supports the immersive nature of the visuals. A wide range of tools have become available over the last 12 months that allow us to digitally mimic the way we hear binaurally. We could always try and record the source binaurally, but depending on the content of the film, that may not be logistically possible. So these 'spatial audio' tools allow us to get as close to the reality of sound as possible.

As an example, we have worked with several high-profile tech companies on big VR campaigns this year, one of which involved dinosaurs stomping around you. Obviously this would be a challenge to record, so we had to sound design from scratch, and then use the tools available to arrange the audio in the 'environment' in a way that would mimic how we would hear it if we were actually there. The ability to do this enhances the immersion significantly.

So, with major platforms such as YouTube 360 and Facebook now both supporting spatial audio, we're on the cusp of a real sound evolution that will take VR to new territory!