

Virtual Reality in Hotel Industry: A Case of Marriott



Source: Unsplash (2021)

Background

Virtual reality (VR) is changing the first step of the customer journey by allowing potential guests to experience and educate themselves about the product, the property and services provided, through immersive tours before deciding to make a purchase. This can foster trust and confidence within the booking process. In recent years, the use of VR for marketing has also gained a lot of attention due to its storytelling and immersive abilities (Bilgihan & Ricci, 2023).

In 2014, the Marriott Hotel Group made its first investment into VR with the #GetTeleported campaign in partnership with the Oculus brand (PR Newswire, 2014). Stepping into the phone booth-like ‘Teleporter’ device, guests will be taken to a black sand beach in Maui, Hawaii and top of a skyscraper in downtown London. Each ‘Teleporter’ device is equipped with an Oculus Rift DK2 VR headset, wireless headphones and suite of onboard 4-D effects system, which generates sensory elements such as heat, wind and mist (PR Newswire, 2014). Together with the 360° live action video mixed with computer-generated imagery, the device can provide a highly realistic experience for the guests (Elkayam, 2023).

At the same time, Marriott also sought to bring the VR experience to the guests’ room with the launch of “VRoom Service”, where guests can rent a set of VR headset for up to 24 hours and have it hand delivered to their room along with simple instructions (Marriott International, 2015). The experience is supported by Marriott’s virtual travel content platform – “VR Postcards”, which offers 360° immersive travel stories across the globe in 3D (Marriott International, 2015).

Challenges

Nevertheless, it appears the Marriott group has discontinued its VR experiences, including the virtual ‘teleporter’ and ‘VRoom Service’, after showcasing at several Marriott hotels for limited time. On the other hand, as one of Marriott’s competitors, Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts has been offering their own version of ‘VRoom Service’ and ‘VR Postcards’ since 2016 (Business+Tech, 2024). Besides VR gear rentals, Shangri-La also uploaded 360° videos of its properties and destinations around the world to the group's YouTube channel, offering free access to everyone (Shangri-La, 2016). Moreover, Shangri-La recently opened a VR Room at its property in Tanjung Aru, Malaysia featuring exciting VR games for guests to enjoy (Shangri-La, 2024). It seems that the Shangri-La group is more willing to make long-term investments into VR, while Marriott sees VR as an opportunity to create urgency through limited-time experience offerings.

Discussion Questions

1. Why might Marriott have chosen to discontinue its VR experiences, while Shangri-La continues to invest in them? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of offering VR experiences as limited-time events versus long-term services?
2. Say you are the management of the Marriott group, would you have chosen to withdraw or continue to invest in VR technology? Why?
3. How might upcoming advancements in VR technology revolutionize experience offerings in hotels?

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Keywords

- Virtual reality (VR)
- Immersive experience
- Technology
- Hotel
- Investment
- Customer experience

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