



Lessons Learned From Experiments in Creating VR Content

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Virtual Reality (VR) creates infinite storytelling possibilities. But VR for advertising has many wondering, “How easy it to make truly engaging ads?” Fresh from creating a headset-optional VR film, the team behind Google’s Art, Copy & Code project shares learnings for brands eager to experiment.

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Virtual Reality is growing in popularity, but there are still a lot of questions about how to pull it off—and reach a broad audience with such a new technology. The team behind Google's Art, Copy & Code project set out to explore ways to create interactive VR experiences more easily and distribute to an audience at scale through Chrome using [WebVR](#). Enter "[Tabel](#)," a VR film experiment where the viewer sits at the center of a restaurant, and by looking around, actively observes other story lines unfolding.

Here, Marcel Baker and Alexis Cox from the Art, Copy & Code project share a few tips and tricks they discovered while creating their VR film, "Tabel."

Q: What is "Tabel," and why did you make it?

Alexis: "Tabel" is an experiment in VR and 360-degree storytelling meant to showcase the potential of VR as a creative canvas for filmmaking. When we were developing the concept for "Tabel," we wanted to experiment with a VR film that could strike a balance between a passive and an interactive viewing experience. We hope "Tabel" can help inspire creators as they explore the narrative and technical boundaries of VR storytelling.

Q: How is "Tabel" different from other VR or 360-degree videos?

Marcel: There are six story lines that unfold simultaneously during the seven-minute film. By looking around, the viewer can choose which stories to listen to by looking in the direction of any character in the film. "Tabel" empowers the viewer with a natural-feeling "super-hearing" ability. This lets the viewer eavesdrop in on various conversations happening within the restaurant.



This experience was created with an audio technique that layers the video together with nine channels of audio, six of which the user can interact with by looking around.

Q: When most people think of VR, they think of viewing content on headsets. Why did you think beyond the headset experience here? And how did you pull it off?

Marcel: We wanted to create an experience that anyone with a smartphone could access, with or without a VR headset. We attempted to remove as many barriers as possible because many people have not tried VR. We built "Tabel" using a browser-based [WebVR](#) experience, which means the film can be streamed via the Chrome browser on desktop, mobile, or enhanced with a headset (Google Cardboard, Daydream View, or HTC Vive). WebVR is an open standard that makes it possible to experience VR in a browser. We used WebVR to make it easy to get into "Tabel".

Q: Why do you think VR and 360-degree video are such rich territory for brands? Is VR advertising the next big thing?

Alexis: The notion of VR advertising doesn't even begin to scratch the

surface of what's possible. Imagine if you could build a world around a brand that a consumer could step into. That's the opportunity for brands. And that's way bigger than advertising. What would that world look like? How would it feel to explore and walk around in? VR gives storytellers the freedom to create an experience that answers these questions. And VR opens up a whole new world (See what I did there?) where brands can invite customers in.

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Q: VR is so new that there's not a hard and fast rulebook for creating content yet. What surprising things did you learn that may help other VR creators?

Alexis: Our biggest takeaway was realizing that [storytelling techniques for VR](#) are still incredibly undefined. We had to invent many processes and techniques along the way. For example, during the ideation process, we found that inviting creative engineers into the initial brainstorm was important. Even before the script was written, we collaboratively came up with the idea for the audio technique that opened the possibility of telling six concurrent stories. The story and the concept for the audio technique were developed at the same time.

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Marcel: Another example was during the filming process. Creating a set design and directing a 360-degree film was unlike a regular film. We filmed "Tabel" using the Odyssey, the [Jump](#) camera Google and GoPro created that has 16 GoPro cameras to capture all 360 degrees of the set. When filming in 360, there is no place to hide the lights, the crew, or even the director. We did several takes of each scene because there was no way to live preview the entire 360 scene. In that sense, there is so

much opportunity for brands to help create and write the rules of VR as a storytelling medium. We're excited to see what stories will be told.