

## 'Each guest experience will be different': VR and the future of theme parks

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. Which of these leisure activities do you find the most interesting? Rank them in order from 1 (most interesting) to 7 (least interesting). Give reasons for your choice.

- visiting a theme park
- visiting a wildlife park
- playing virtual-reality games
- going to a sports or leisure centre
- going with friends to the cinema
- reading a novel
- watching a film on TV

#### 2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

alight

attendee

augmented

awesome

cavernous

customization

respects

ship

smellscaping

sombre

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is the relationship between smells and place.
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ atmosphere or occasion is serious or sad.
3. If you pay your \_\_\_\_\_, you go to someone's funeral.
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ room or building is very large and dark.
5. If you \_\_\_\_\_ people out, you move them to another place.
6. An \_\_\_\_\_ is someone who is present at an event or activity.
7. An \_\_\_\_\_ event or thing is extremely good or impressive.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ reality is the technology of putting images or information produced by a computer on top of a real view, image, or video so that the user can see both at the same time.
9. If you \_\_\_\_\_, you get off a train, bus, or other vehicle.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is adapting a product so that it meets the specific requirements of the buyer or user.

## 'Each guest experience will be different': VR and the future of theme parks

### Level 3: Advanced

#### ***Expo in east London shows how important augmented and virtual reality will be, as attractions move with the times***

Alex Hern

19 September, 2022

- 1 In the fight for theme-park visitors, the battle lines have been drawn – monster trucks, virtual-reality zombie warfare and “smellscaping”, just thankfully not all at the same time.
- 2 And while there was a sombre atmosphere around parts of London as tens of thousands lined up to pay their respects to the Queen, there were 10,000 more gathered in a convention centre in East London experiencing the future of the theme park.
- 3 The convention centre’s hall was dominated by a monster truck on hydraulics, rocking riders and a nine-foot-tall alien 3D-printed in a matter of hours. Alongside that were several full-size bowling lanes and numerous soft-play areas. Pinball manufacturer Stern did, however, delay the launch of its James Bond pinball machines as a mark of respect for the Queen.
- 4 Anyone taking a walk down the cavernous hall couldn’t help but notice the vast quantity of virtual-reality headsets. Through VR, riders on the monster truck experienced being thrown about as though they were being driven around a real arena, while rollercoaster manufacturer Mack Rides could demonstrate some of its own rides without needing to ship attendees out to the company’s own Europa Park in Germany.
- 5 The technology also helps provide interactivity, something that Mark Beumers, Chief Executive of Dutch “dark rides” vendor Lagotronics Projects, thinks is going to become increasingly crucial to the experience.
- 6 “Visitors expect more and more, since they have grown up with technology, and they want to experience technology in a theme park in a different and better way than they can at home. And since they already have a lot of technology at home, a theme park needs to be the extra step.”
- 7 But, Beumers says, virtual reality has its limits. Simply getting headsets on and off riders can add unacceptable delays to loading up rides, and the technology limits one of the best aspects of going to a theme park: sharing the experience with the friends and family you visit with.
- 8 And while the technology was just starting to be installed in parks towards the beginning of 2018, the impact of Covid since 2019 has given operators a chance to consider and shift their approach.
- 9 “In 2019, people were thinking, this is the new thing, this is going to take off,” says Emily Popovich, of theme park design agency Outdoor Factory. “But then Covid hit, and everyone sort of forgot about that.”
- 10 “And then, after Covid, everyone is calm and developing new awesome things. There are so many geniuses in this industry. So we come out of Covid and everything is better than it was in 2019 and nobody cares about that any more.”
- 11 In its place, says Maximilian Roeser, Mack Rides’s head of marketing, is a new push for augmented reality that lets riders experience all the benefits of VR without being stuck in a bubble that shuts them off from the real world.
- 12 In the company’s latest creations, riders even put the headsets on long before they get on the rollercoaster itself, with the queue, boarding and alighting experiences all having virtual additions.
- 13 But Roeser says the biggest changes are likely to be those behind the scenes that such technology enables. “Theme parks will develop in a way that will give you more and more interactivity.”
- 14 “More and more customization to your customers as well: all the parks will know who is coming in, their name, their age, probably what they like and what they dislike, and therefore they can transform the park for each guest. And each guest experience will be different and probably fitted directly to that guest.”

## 'Each guest experience will be different': VR and the future of theme parks

### Level 3: Advanced

---

- 15 "We've already worked with that because we have some alpha options for our coaster ride so that you can choose your own experience: one person that is sitting on the left-hand side could see another movie compared to the person on the right-hand side."
- 16 The classic experiences aren't going anywhere, though. For many, like Julie Rice-Witherell of conference organizer IAAPA, the global association for the attractions industry, there's still nothing that matches the thrill of riding a new rollercoaster for the first time.
- 17 "Every time they build a new one anywhere near me, it's like – it's just something different. I wouldn't say it's better, but it is faster or it has more turns or, you know, hits higher G forces, whatever. It's always something new that you've never experienced."

© Guardian News and Media 2022

First published in *The Guardian*, 19/09/2022

## 'Each guest experience will be different': VR and the future of theme parks

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Why was there a sombre atmosphere in parts of London?
2. How long did it take to print the nine-foot-tall alien?
3. What were at the convention in vast quantities?
4. What, according to Mark Beumers, will become crucial to the theme-park experience?
5. What adds delays to loading up rides?
6. What gave the operators time to change their approach?
7. What allows riders to experience all the benefits of VR without being closed off from the real world?
8. What will customization do for guests?
9. What, according to Julie Rice-Witherell, is the best experience of all?
10. Why is it so good?

#### 4 Key language

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- |          |                            |
|----------|----------------------------|
| 1. draw  | a. the launch of something |
| 2. pay   | b. limits                  |
| 3. delay | c. a rollercoaster         |
| 4. have  | d. battle lines            |
| 5. share | e. experiences             |
| 6. ride  | f. your respects           |

## 'Each guest experience will be different': VR and the future of theme parks

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Virtual-reality theme parks are a waste of time."
- "I'd rather experience something directly than experience it through a screen."
- "Computers are bad for your health."

#### 6 In your own words

- a. Virtual reality is not only used in the leisure industry. Use an internet search engine to find other (more serious) sectors that use virtual reality, for example education, design, and job training. Choose one of these and makes notes on why and how virtual reality is used in this area.
- b. Report your findings to the class.