

Welcome to extended reality or XR

 By [Shaune Jordaan](#)

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Just as brands are coming to terms with the various realities (and not just in the post-new normal Covid sense) that is AR (augmented reality), VR (virtual reality) and MR (mixed reality), extended reality or XR has joined the mix to keep us on our toes by ensuring brand offerings are optimised even further.



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While AR, VR and MR are no longer novel “tech terms” but an integrated part of how we experience the world, particularly as it is applied to problem solving in businesses, it is pertinent to ask what XR is likely to mean for brand enhancement. Thing is, is it essential for brands to adopt this new reality and if yes, then how and what’s in it for them?

So what actually is XR?

Referenced from Wikipedia, and in summary, XR is a combination of a mixed reality environment. Simply put, it is the umbrella term used to describe a fusion of AR, VR and MR. While the term is much to digest, the important bit to unpack and understand is its potential for unlocking a business’ value through the optimisation of various organisational functions.

XR boasts an improved customer journey, better employee performance and productivity, and the potential to create new content and services among its capabilities. Ikea uses XR to allow customers to see what furniture would look like in their home, through their phones. This try-before-you-buy option further enhances the Swedish homeware brand’s reputation for customer-centric solutions.

The experience element

If there is a universal truth in the martech space currently, it is that marketers need to be prepared to innovate at every turn, and not be afraid of embracing disruptive tools and technologies to elevate their campaigns and enhance the customer experience.

We've seen what AR filters on Snapchat, Google Cardboard and 360-degree videos on YouTube have brought to the consumer experience. Testament to the success of these technologies is the hunger for close brand engagement from a consumer standpoint. As marketers, we need to explore alternate mediums to promote intimate brand engagement and XR affords brands this very real opportunity to do so.

The power of XR lies in how it takes complex content and information and turns it into a format and experience that is easier to understand and pleasant to experience. In its current guise it is an important learning tool thanks to this ability to “represent[ing] complex content in interactive, tactile and emotionally resonant ways that [further] differentiate the brand's offering”, according to this [South China Morning Post article](#). XR is particularly powerful when it comes to training in high-risk industries, such as complex machinery training, fire safety training and driver simulation. Not only does XR provide realistic skills practice but it also helps to reduce the number of learner mistakes, protects property and assets, and helps to ensure long-term knowledge retention.

And while video might have killed the radio star, XR may well exterminate video. Video content has enjoyed a meteoric rise in the last decade – current stats suggest that 300 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute – but video is a linear format that lacks engagement. XR, on the other hand, is interactive, immerse, engaging and thus far likelier to leave a lasting impression.

The efficiency element

While the experience element of XR plays an important role in building brand appeal and equity, the business case for the adoption of a new technology needs to be carefully considered. In the case of XR the question to ask is how can it help to drive operational efficiencies, increase productivity, and drive relevance by adapting to all user behaviour on digital platforms?

The potential of XR extends far beyond the advertising and marketing sector. Sectors likely to extract the most benefit from the tech are healthcare, engineering, real estate and retail. The potential for the healthcare sector is particularly exciting – in fact, a [Harvard Business Review article](#) reckons XR has the potential to be as ubiquitous in healthcare as the stethoscope, specifically in the way that it allows for surgeons, for example, to see digital images directly overlaid on their field of view.

Beyond the customer experience, XR has shown to improve internal communication and collaboration, simplify training and significantly allow for the more efficient analysis of data.

As the real and virtual world continue to converge, the possibilities for brands are endless. The future is indeed filled with endless possibility.

ABOUT SHAUNE JORDAAN

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