Level: B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

VR Theme Park

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

Monster trucks and virtual-reality zombie warfare are just two of the ways companies are hoping to attract visitors to theme parks. There was a sombre atmosphere around parts of London as tens of thousands queued to view the Queen's coffin. But at the same time, more than 10,000 people gathered in a convention centre in East London to experience the future of the theme park.

Anyone taking a walk through the cavernous hall could see the enormous number of virtual-reality headsets. VR threw riders on a monster truck about as though they were driving around a real arena, while rollercoaster manufacturer Mack Rides could demonstrate some of its own rides without attendees needing to visit the company's own Europa Park in Germany.

The technology also helps provide interactivity, something that is going to become increasingly crucial to the experience, according to Mark Beumers, Chief Executive of Dutch "dark rides" vendor Lagotronics Projects.

"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."

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.

"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 forgot about that. And then, after Covid, everyone is 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."

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.

In the company's latest creations, riders even put the headsets on long before they get on the rollercoaster itself, with virtual additions when they are queueing, getting on and getting off.

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.

"They will be adapted to each customer: 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.

"We already worked with that because we have some 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 a different movie from the person on the right-hand side."

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.

"Every time they build a new one anywhere near me, it's something different. I wouldn't say it's better, but it is faster. It's always something new that you've never experienced."

LIVEWORKSHEETS

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Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article?

- The convention hall was quite small.
- The monster-truck riders drove around a real arena.
- People who wanted to experience the Mack Rides rollercoaster had to go to Germany.
- The new technology is also interactive.
- Putting headsets on and taking them off causes delays.
- Covid interrupted the development of new VR technology.
- Maximilian Roeser is Mack Rides's director of research.
- Riders on the virtual rollercoaster experience VR while they are queueing.
- Future theme parks will adapt to the individual needs of each customer.
- Julie Rice-Witherell thinks that nothing matches the thrill of a VR rollercoaster.

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

• theme	• number
• enormous	• atmosphere
• chief	• park
• real	• reality
• sombre	• world
• virtual	• executive

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