

# VirtuReality

*Navigating the Emerging Market Mindscape*

Ray Podder | 07/07/07

Last week a [Kwik-E-Mart](#) opened around the corner. You know, the one from the imaginary world of The Simpsons? Of course the clever branding is not lost on me. Still, I'm fascinated that Kwik-E-Mart is a "real" venue, the [Geico Cavemen](#) have their own sitcom, and fictitious TV [character blogs](#) are things that real viewers can comment on.

Somewhere between singing along with the intro to a kitschy TV classic to jones-ing for our "[Crackberry](#)" it has already happened. You don't have to be a [Twitter](#)-head or a [Second-Lifer](#) to see the melding your real and virtual experiences into one.

Our consciousness is increasingly occupied by the same mental constructs in both the physical world, and the virtual media and communication world we all relate to and connect with. In other words, we are all living in **VIRTUREALITY**, the experiencing of both the REAL and VIRTUAL at the same time, characterized by the following:

- Non-linear experiencing of time and place in multiple dimensions.
- Hyperlocal connecting of physical objects with virtual identities and vice versa.
- Digitizing our actions towards understanding the impact of our decisions.

Each time you think about a brand, relate to a celebrity as if you "know" them, believe the value of your investments based on "imagined" future earnings, communicate with a screen or a fancy piece of wired plastic, wish you could "undo" or "rewind" a physically real experience, you are in essence merging your mental constructs of meaning into VirtuReality.

## The Non-Linear Experiencing of Time

We're all familiar with reruns of episodic television, "retro" fashions and products, [pop culture references](#) being more common than historical ones and bygone eras forever captured on celluloid, vinyl and now digital music and video. But what happens now that we're all media producers?

The effect of recordable experiences by anyone and everyone seriously puts chronological consciousness in question. Today, [TV Land](#) viewers can already transport themselves to the past in two dimensions, so what's the compounded effect of [multi-dimensional](#), multi-[sensory](#) experiences widely available?

The proliferation of [Lifecaching](#), along with technologies like [Brain-to-Computer UIs](#), [geotagged](#) innovations like [Photosynth](#), essentially change how we experience any given time and space through input from everyone. As long as an experience has a recorded reference point, the reality of being able to transport yourself with any [time](#) and space known to anyone is soon becoming a readily available reality.

Even before that happens, just consider our use of hyperlinks now. Isn't a link both the past (produced earlier) and the future (outcome dependent on your decision to click or not click) to arrive at the present?

## The Hyper-Connecting of Our Physical Reality

[Bruce Sterling's](#) visionary [blog post](#) in a recent issue of Wired is not that far from the reality now being cultivated. As more physical locations are referenced with data points such as [Google Earth](#) and related [mapping mash-ups](#), the real and virtual increasingly coexist on the same conscious plane.

[RFID](#) and [smart dust](#) tagged objects are no longer science fiction, but factual matters of efficiency from both enterprise to households. When things in the physical world have virtual counterparts and vice versa, the mental and physical constructs not only interrelate, but become interdependent on each other.

For example, in a hyperlocal world, your decision to buy something or patronize a restaurant might very well be dependent on the "vibe" you sense from multitude of geotagged reviews for that particular physical entity. Just as our natural ecosystem negotiates supply and demand to maintain homeostasis, a world with connected spaces and objects represent the same for the market ecosystem. That brings us to next emerging phenomenon:

## The Understanding of The Measurable Impact of Our Decisions

Both real and virtual real-time information connected to points of reference, lets us better understand the impact of our decisions. We are actually living through that right now.

We can check our account balances on the mobile, monitor the response to our creative output on [social networks](#), buy services like [Airfare](#) based on real-time supply and demand and even our [carbon footprint](#) at each purchase point, and that's only the beginning..

Soon, the idea of advertising becomes [replaced](#) by the idea of recommendations by someone whose agenda you can verify by a multitude of measurable factors. Advertisers can no longer say one thing and do something else. That's over. It's over because the next generation of collective decision making tools like [Vosnaps](#), [Diggs](#), [Raplcafs](#) and [Attap's Riffs](#) can instantly tell us whether or not it's true.

## Marketing 3.0 : Innovating Ahead of Change

A digitized, virtualized physical world not bound to a fixed timeline consciousness, and with the ability for individuals to make intelligent networked decisions throws more than a few currently accepted marketing paradigms out of whack.

Concepts like “segmenting” and “targeting” become nearly impossible with exponentially increasing variables of intersecting timeline, location, mood, intent and more compounding the difficulty of executing on previously acceptable marketing thinking. While some symptomatic fixes focus on more clever ways of [trying to hold onto](#) what used to work, the adaptive approach may be to rethink what's really next.

First, in a VirtuReal world, there is no online or offline. There are no real distinctions between business model, brand or competitive strategy. ***There are only connections and meaning.*** Human nature and the nature of systemic connection design are the only constants.

In a VirtuReal world, ***thoughts*** are the ultimate drivers of reality. Imagine how our thoughts (virtual) equal actions (real), and then translate that into a collective thought effecting collective action for real time supply and demand. In other words, how we collectively “feel” about something now becomes more important than ever to determine whether or not that “something” survives in our market ecosystem. The real focus now should be on how your brand provides value to the system by design, communicates just-in-time by vibe and understands how it is experienced in both virtual and real contexts.

## Systemic Value by Design

In a VirtuReal world, people are not going to come to you, you have to make your offering available to fit into how they personalize and subscribe value for [themSelves](#).

**The real value is enabling the connections not managing the content.** The open APIs of [Googlemaps](#) and [Facebook](#) are examples of this in action. [Plaxo](#) is a contact and task management brand that also does this well. When your contacts are Plaxo members, you don't have to worry about ever updating their contact info; the design allows for each member to update their own info, the end value of which is a "self-updating" address book.

A good design like this [Moving Earth Widget](#), which connects seamlessly to any customizable user space should be the de-facto standard to play in VirtuReality. Virtual and real goods need to move seamlessly in market spaces based on collective mood or "vibe", much like the ideology we hold in our heads affect the ideas we accept or reject. Design of the system is critical to ensure survival where access is open and the real and virtual are indefinitely connected.

A bad design example is like the inventory updating models of [Expedia](#) which are potential dinosaurs as long as they require manual updates of third party info marked up from their original suppliers.

In a VirtuReal world, the first question for any service or product is its relative value to market ecosystem. If it is not a symbiotic relationship, and it causes friction within the system, the system (the connected collective of all of us) will eventually reject it.

## Tuning into the Network Vibe!

As our inboxes and RSS readers fill up with increasing frequency, our ability to consciously read, evaluate and act become much too tasking for our cognitive limits.

Brand experiences that can enable us to manage our participation at a "gut" level stand a much better chance at connecting with us, than those whose experience requires our conscious attention.

The idea of Awareness=Relevance is not only tired, but less likely to succeed when repetition in our attention limited mind spaces actually generates more indifference than interest. Instead, it's about action relative to circumstance and "[mood](#)". This is where virtual "vibe" rules, and physical reality conforms to it.

[Microblogging](#) like Twitter or [Pownce](#), or 1-click commenting like [Click Comments](#) may seem like idiotic ramblings by people who have too much time on their hands, or gross oversimplifications, but their growing popularity is an undeniable indicator of the importance of gauging “vibe” within a network of our connected peers.

This does not mean that thoughtful communications are replaced by rapid, pulsating forms of communications, but rather, these simplified “feelers” over time allow us to ACT on what is the most meaningful without getting drowned in information.

### **Living in Multi Dimensional Contexts**

Regardless of the seemingly limitless [potential of the virtual world](#), the real driver of change is first and foremost human desire. Human desire cannot get fulfilled from virtual experiences alone, otherwise online porn would kill men’s desire for real sex.

Similarly, watching Food Network or the Travel Channel increases the desire to try new recipes and visit new places, not satisfy them. Our primitive hardwiring simply prevents us from infinitely expanding the virtual. In VirtuReality, the more engaging the virtual experience is, the equivalent is expected in the physical world and vice versa.

The [Apple Genius Bar](#), Starbucks’ [Hear Music Stores](#), [Circuit City 24/24](#) Reserve and Pick Up, and these [shop offline/buy online stats](#) are today’s living examples of business models capitalizing on the emerging VirtuReality.

The next generation of brands to survive and thrive in VirtuReality may need to adapt even quicker and reinvent business model and brand value on the fly according to the network “vibe” of the moment. Influencing vibe may become the predominant activity of marketers over the mass market paradigm of “messaging” which is already dying an uneventful death.

Still, as long as our desire to communicate, interact, exchange and learn from each other remain, commerce will continue to be the unifying factor. Although commerce is independent from ideology, politics or religion, it is not independent of change.

## So What does VirtuReality really change?

We know that our hardwiring simply won't allow us to accept the virtual as a substitute for the real and vice versa. As our mental and physical constructs get blurred influencing "vibe" will likely put the desire for *peace of mind* at the top of the list.

However, the key aspect of living in VirtuReality is understanding the limitations of both the virtual and real within our collective consciousness. As virtual experiences get more immersive and as real items and locations have measurable data and "vibe" attached to them, what we think about and *how we think* about them will play a much larger role than ever before.

Our points of reference to share common contexts will change much faster than ever before. The prior example of pop culture references being more relatable than historical ones is a clear indicator of that. Especially when time, place and collective "feeling" can turn those points of reference into a soup of confusing information instantly.

But as long as we know that we can't share meaning until we've shared context; we will look for ways to connect on common contexts even if it means shedding some tried and true mental constructs from the past. The human need for connecting on shared meaning is not going away anytime soon, and if we can truly embrace VirtuReality, a world of infinite possibilities await...

**Ray Podder** works with emerging brands to dream up the next ideas to make our lives easier, more enjoyable, more connected to each other and hopefully better than before. He uses his vision and thinking as a designer, strategist and entrepreneur to create the when, now. To learn more, please visit [GROW](#).

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