



March 20-24, 2023
San Francisco, CA

A Case for Relaxing VR

Speakers: Melanie Harke & Shawn Patton

#GDC23

There will a link to our slides at the end of this presentation





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Who are we?

18

18+ Years of Experience

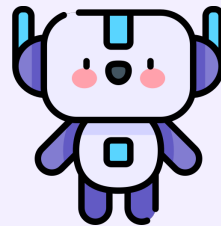


Early Childhood Education

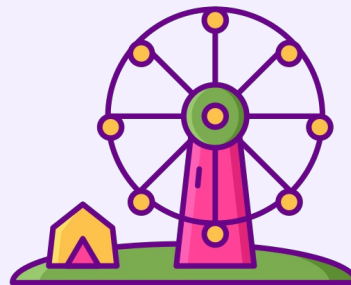


Melanie Harke

Digital Producer
@Fred Rogers Productions
She / Her



Connected Toys



Theme Park Experiences



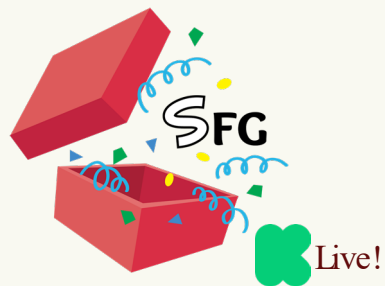
VR Games & Therapy

Icons from Freepik

Who are we?

20

20 Years of Experience



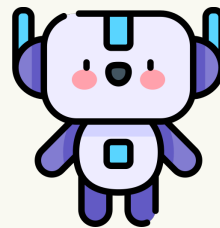
Board Game Creation
surprisinglyfungames.com



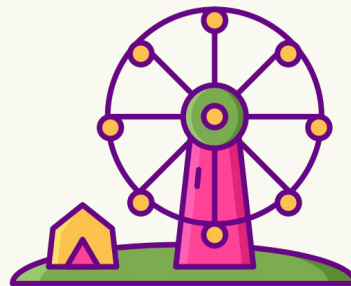
Shawn Patton

**Principal Game Designer
@Schell Games**

**IEYTD, Among Us, Lost Recipes
He / Him**



Connected Toys



Theme Park Experiences



VR Games & Therapy

Icons from Freepik

What is a relaxing game?



What is a relaxing game?



Our Definition

1. Play at your own pace

Play at your own pace

Not just time but also game objectives



Our Definition

1. Play at your own pace
2. Opt in to Conflict or Stress

Opt in to Conflict or Stress



Our Definition

1. Play at your own pace
2. Opt in to Conflict or Stress
3. Easy to play

Easy to Play

Accessible

1. Easy to Find / Buy / Get into

Easy to Play

Accessible (even for “non-Gamers”!)

1. Easy to Find / Buy / Get into
2. Easy to understand why you’d want to play it

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1. Easy to Find / Buy / Get into
2. Easy to understand why you’d want to play it
3. Easy to interact with

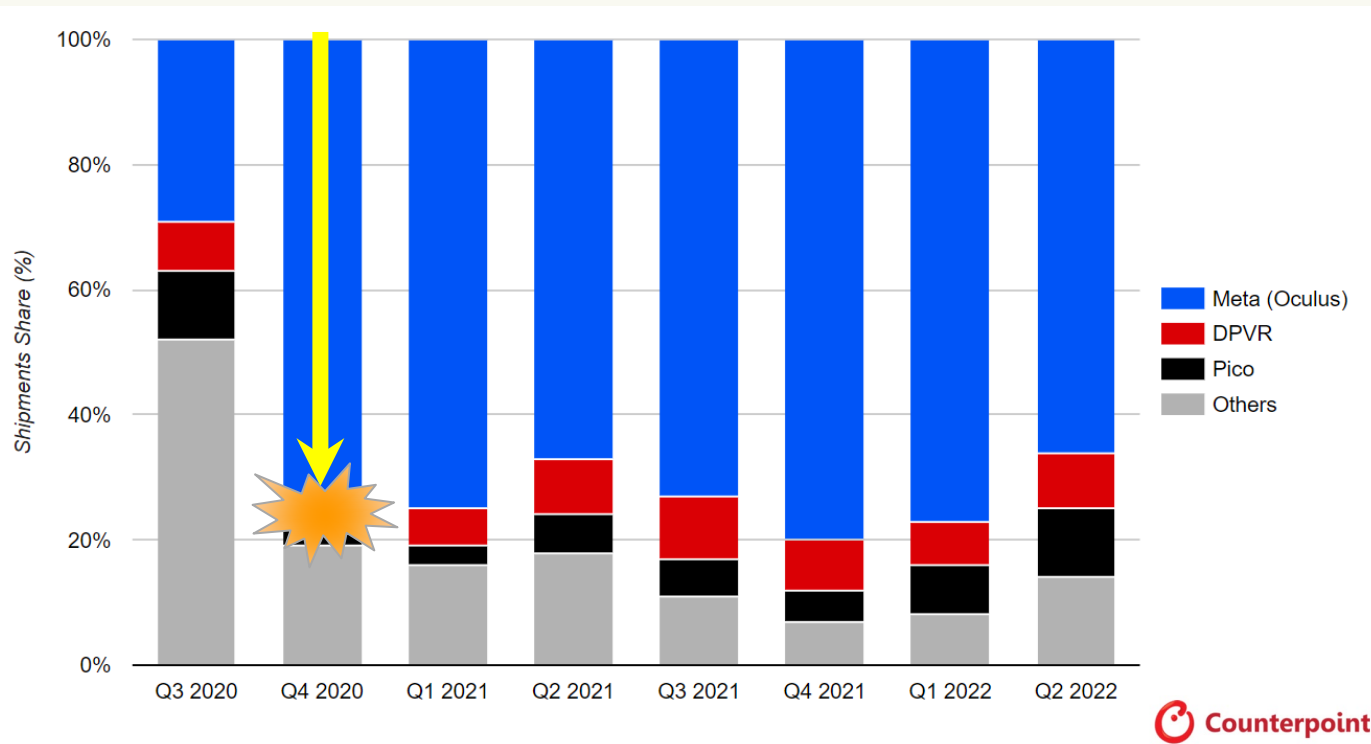
The VR Market

Current VR Market

1. Grandview Research: Global 20 21 VR market \$21.8 billion 😊
2. Global Data: Global 20 21 VR market \$6.9 billion 😞
3. Markets and Markets: Global 20 21 VR market \$37 billion 😊
4. Statista: Global 20 21 VR market \$12 billion 😞
5. Statista: Global 20 21 VR market \$28 billion 😊

BILLIONS!

Current VR Market

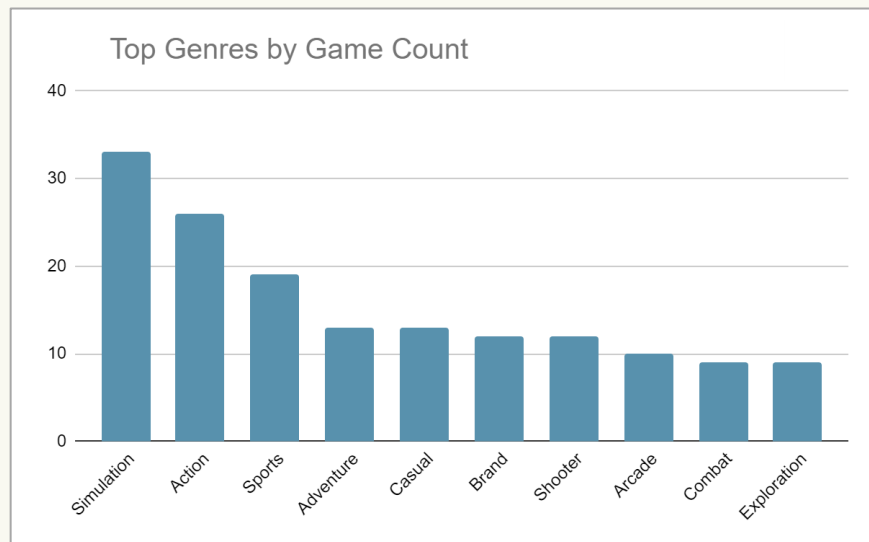


Meta Quest 2 Market

~~15 Million Quest 2s~~

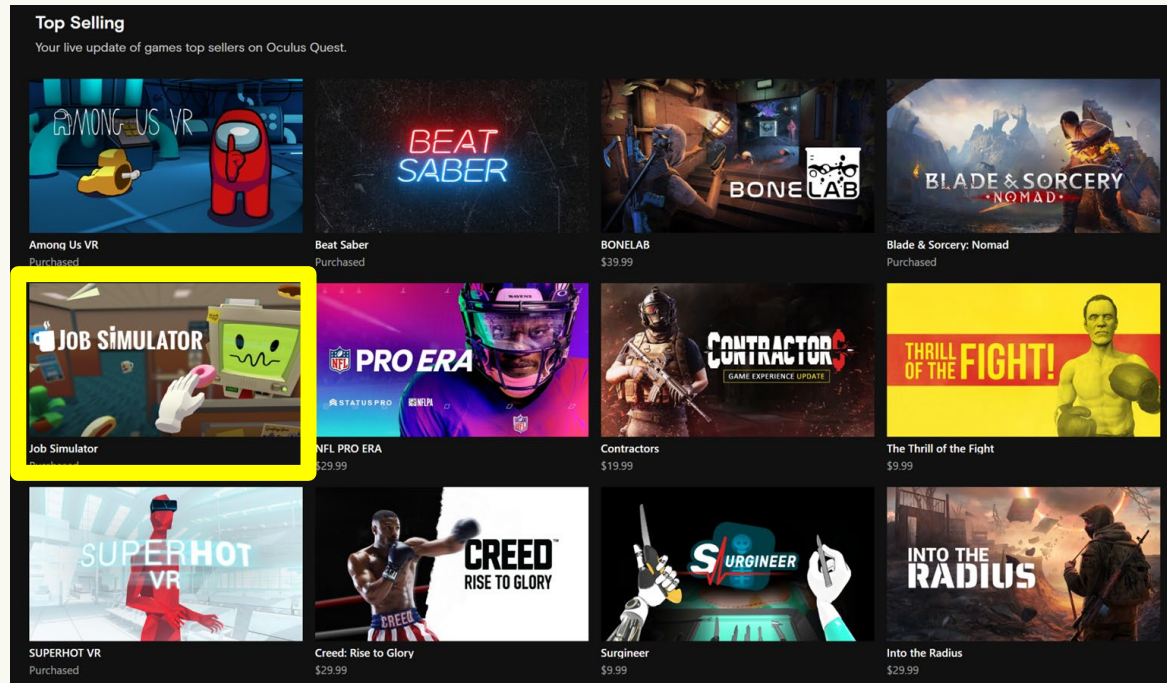
20 Million Quest 2s!

30 Million PS5s

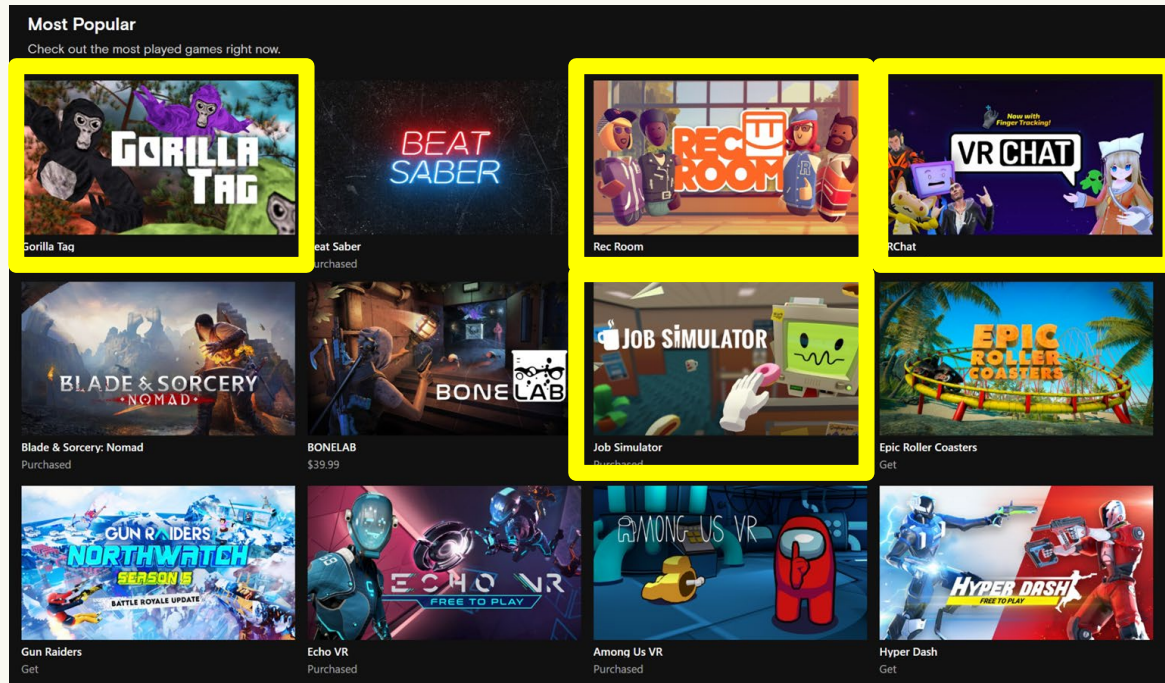


Shout out to Charlie from Product for helping me with this slide!

Top Selling



Most Popular

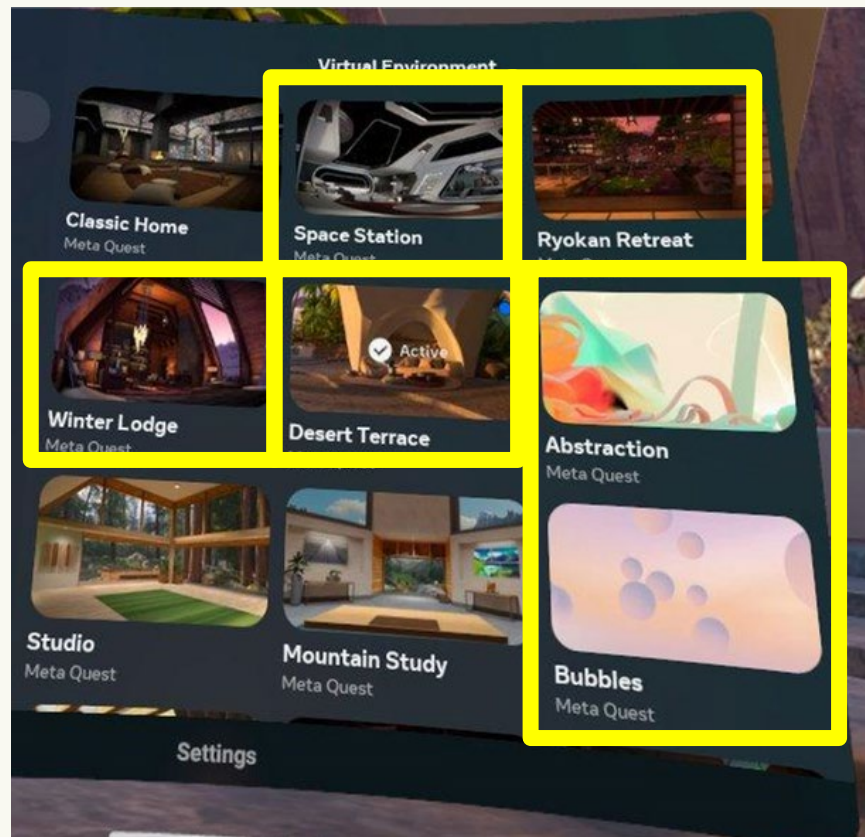


Why VR is good for relaxing

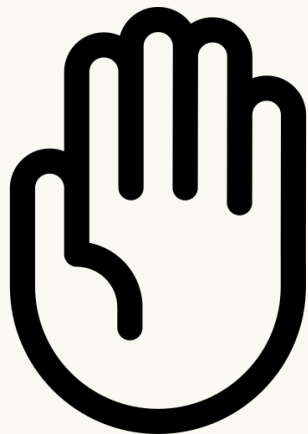
1. Immersion

Immersion

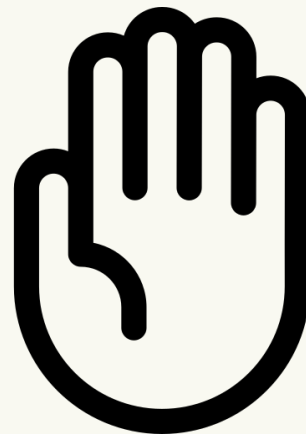
Moment of New Reality



Quick Show of Hands



**Own a Quest
or Quest 2?**



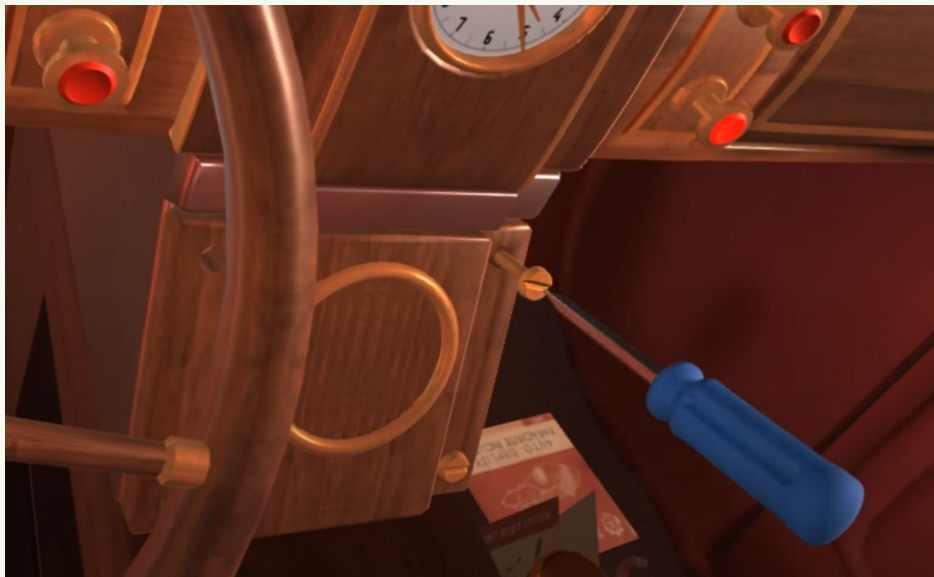
**Ever changed
your virtual
environment?**

Immersion



Why VR is good for relaxing

1. Immersion
2. Intuitive Interactions



Intuitive Interactions

1. If a player thinks they should be able to do it, they should be able to do it
2. No bad surprises, telegraph what will happen
3. Let them use their bodies

From the 18th Experimental Gameplay
Workshop: A Game Sam Polglase and I made



Intuitive Interactions



Why VR is good for relaxing

1. Immersion
2. Intuitive Interactions

Why VR is good for relaxing

1. Immersion
2. Intuitive Interaction
3. Therapeutic

Therapy



- 1.Procedural Memory
- 2.Attention
- 3.Psychomotor Skills
- 4.Sequencing
- 5.Sorting



Therapy

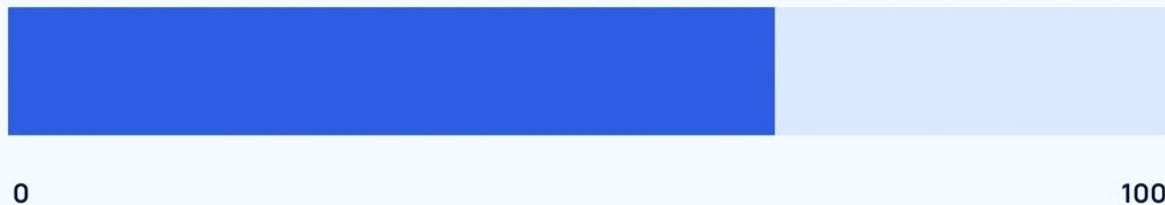


Do people want relaxing VR games?



Do people want relaxing VR games?

66% of gamers agree that relaxation is the most popular reason for playing video games



From ESA Report 2021

Do people want relaxing VR games?



Do people want relaxing VR games?



Do people want relaxing VR games?





Contacted Other Devs



1. Would you consider [your game] a relaxing VR experience?

“Absolutely ... We often hear players say that they retreat to Walkabout to ‘just chill’ or to wind down from a hard day.” - Don Carson, Sr Art Director - Mighty Coconut

“I did want to make the game low-pressure so people felt like they could take their time with the puzzles.” -Thomas Van Bouwel maker of Cubism

“Up to a certain point. Kartoffl introduces itself as a chill, casual and welcoming game, and can be approached very casually.” -Martin Sivertsen, Game Director of Kartoffl from Breach VR

“I would definitely consider Garden of the Sea a relaxing VR experience. In the same way that I would consider laying a puzzle in real life, or watering your plants, or completing a little craft for yourself is relaxing.” -Linnéa Östedt Harrison Creative Director at Neat Corporation

“Yes, there's definitely something very calming and meditative when you're in a beautiful botanical space [Fujii]” -Eddie Lee Founder, Funktronic Labs

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1. Would you consider [your game] a relaxing VR experience?



2. Do you have any favorite anecdotes?

"Many of the compliments the game has gotten are from players that say things like, "I have reconnected with my Dad" or "I get to hang out with my brother who lives 600 miles away"

- Don Carson

"After many re-designs I ended up with the current control scheme where the whole game can be played with just the triggers - and it's been great to see that this has helped make the game more accessible to newcomers..." -Thomas Van Bouwel

"You can 'poke' the spuds to have them wiggle a bit and give off cute sounds, and we've seen so many players expressing pure joy about small things like that..." -Martin Sivertsen

"One particular family would play a little bit with their kids every evening before bed, instead of a bedtime story." -Linnéa Östedt Harrison

"We received a lot of very positive feedback from quite a lot of older folks, I'm talking 50-70 year olds and specifically female grandparents." -Eddie Lee

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3. Did you emphasize or downplay the relaxing nature in your marketing? Why?

“[emphasize] ...we have even started to include dedicated places to sit and hang out.”

- Don Carson

“I definitely try to emphasize it - mainly by using the same relaxing piano music from the game in my trailers and promo material. I want to make sure to communicate the feeling of the game, and that this is a low-pressure, accessible experience.”-Thomas Van Bouwel

“...because of our art direction and soundtrack I do think there's a certain air of "chillness" inherent in [Kartoffl]... but we made no deliberate decisions beyond that to focus particularly on how relaxing - or not - the game is.” -Martin Sivertsen

“...an important aspect was indeed relaxation! While it's not directly featured as a game mechanic, it's so integral to the entire ‘point’ of the game I wanted to give it a specific spotlight in the trailer” - Marko Permanto CTO at Neat Corporation

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4. Would you consider the game to be a success for your studio? Critical? Financial? Did the relaxing nature play a part in that reception?

“To be honest we are just as surprised as anyone that Walkabout has been such a hit ... All of these seemingly separate elements have proven to be a recipe for relaxing whether it is by yourself or with friends.” - Don Carson

“Cubism was my first commercial release, and it's enabled me to work full-time making games. I should note that I'm a one-man studio, so the threshold to financial success is definitely lower than for bigger teams.

It's been great to see that people find the game relaxing. Every now and then I'll see a Reddit thread where folks are asking for recommendations on good VR games for beginners, and it's always great to see folks recommending Cubism in that context.”

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4. Success? continued

“Kartoffl is by no means a smash hit financially, but the feedback we are getting from players, reviewers and critics has been overwhelmingly positive. We do therefore consider it a studio success in the sense that we are proud to have been able to pull together to design, create and release a polished and fine game.” -Martin Sivertsen

“We would consider [Garden of the Sea] a spiritual success for us. For at least two of us, this game was a passion project in that it reflected what we needed in our lives - a warm hug and a moment of calm. It is the type of game I have been dreaming about making for my entire career. It has had a very positive reception, but it has not seen widespread adoption or any large numbers of downloads - but we are hoping that it is a matter of awareness.” -Linnéa Östedt Harrison

“Yes definitely, even though it was not a huge commercial success, I'm extremely proud of [Fujii] because we were able to manifest something that was weird, magical and meaningful towards the world.” -Eddie Lee

“Not really- the VR market is too small. It's very difficult to make money back on a VR title, especially with the cost to create one so high.” -Michael Austin, Founder Hidden Path Entertainment

4. Success? continued

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“I remember getting a letter saying how much [a player] liked just sitting on the beach and watching the waves come in in VR, that it was a fun travel experience” -Michael Austin

5. More relaxing games? Any other thoughts?

“Mighty Coconut is actively contemplating other projects and although none of them currently are centered around relaxation we have to keep in mind the lessons learned on Walkabout. We shouldn't ignore the potential to create games that are just a pleasure to inhabit beyond the gameplay we offer.” -Don Carson

“[My next is] definitely less relaxing, but I do hope to still make it an accessible experience and easy to pick-up-and-play like Cubism. It's great to see interest in using VR for relaxation I think folks new to the medium mainly associate it with movement and action, but I've had some of my best experiences in VR sitting on my couch with a good seated VR game, winding down after a day of work.” -Thomas Van Bouwel

“Possibly... The idea of ‘relaxing’ - just like ‘fun’ - can mean many different things to different people, so the designer's dilemma of catering to some at the potential exclusion of others is always there.” -Martin Sivertsen

“We're not making VR games anymore, but if I did, I like relaxing ones. I do hope VR takes off in a big way someday!” -Michael Austin

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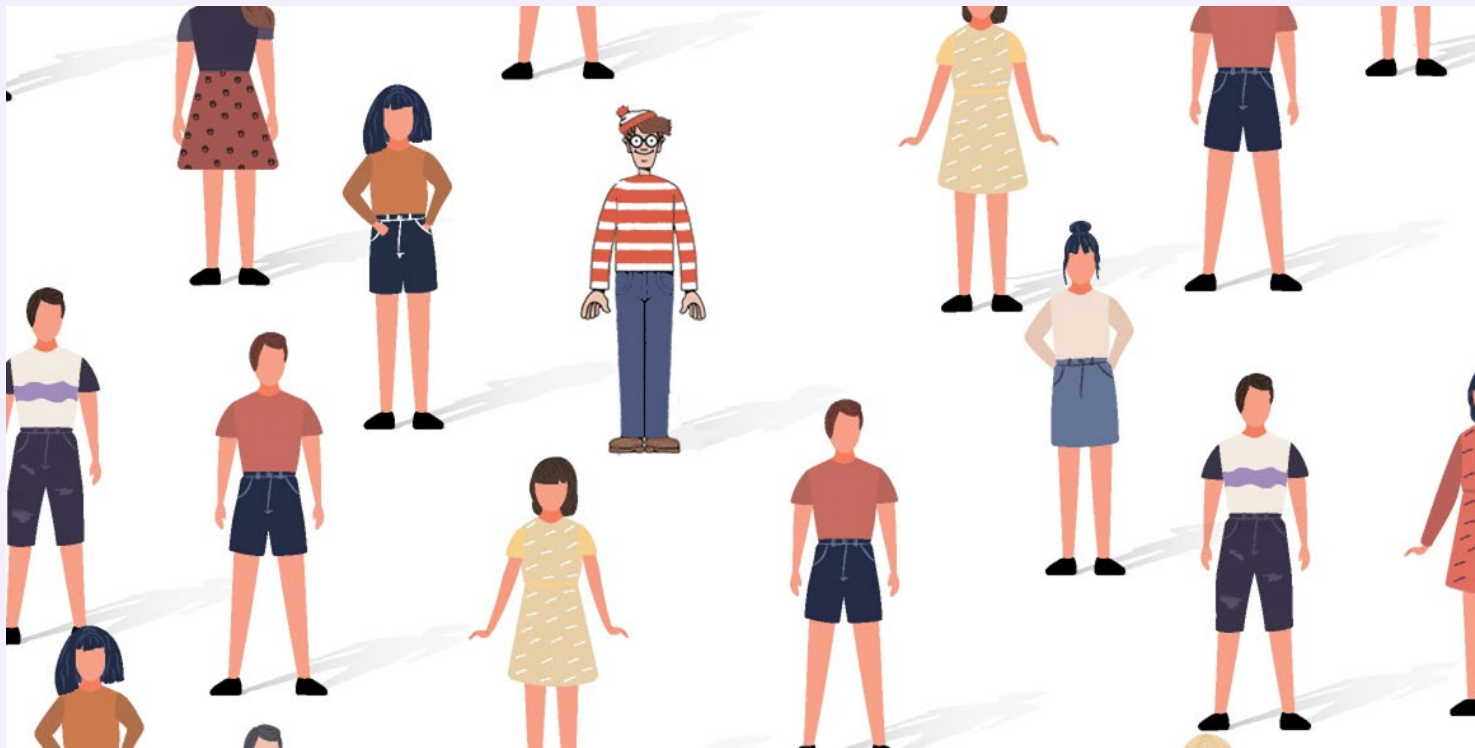
“Yes, I would definitely love to, but I feel like the risk of developing these types of games is quite high, simply because seeking funding to develop these niche experiences is difficult and the development budget required to develop something like this can be non-trivial.

Honestly, it's a bit of a bummer that the VR space didn't become more mass market and diverse in terms of demographic. To develop a game like Fujii which is a niche experience within the VR market - which is already a niche consumer space can be very daunting. And I hope in the future that the market will start to open up a bit more. Even though it's been 6-7 years since this VR generation began, we are still hopeful for VR to become mass market.” -Eddie Lee

First, A Caveat



Discoverability



Discoverability

Casual Fun

Perfect for just about anyone, these games are easy to pick up and play.

- Garden of the Sea
- Townscaper VR
- The Curious Tale of the Stolen Pets
- Raccoon Lagoon
- Shores of Loci
- Luna
- Tsuru
- Silhouette
- What the Bat?

Play Your Way

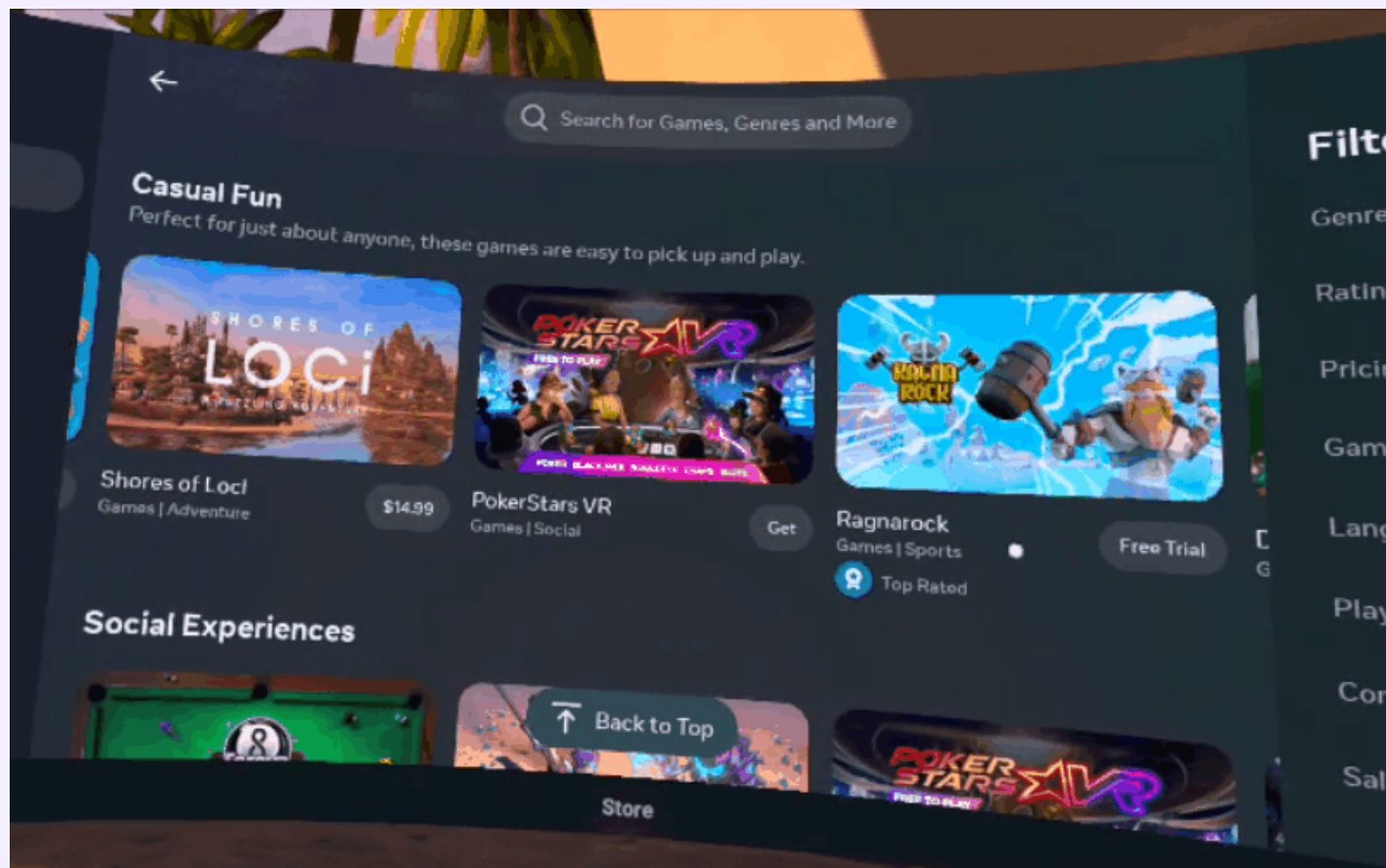
Customize your experience with subtitles, comfortable locomotion options, seated mode, and more.

- Kartoffl
- What the Bat?
- Vermillion
- Puzzling Places

Challenging Puzzlers

Test your mental mettle with clever brain teasers and narrative mysteries.

- Kartoffl
- Tsuru
- Luna
- Shores of Loci
- Cubism



Immediate Perception



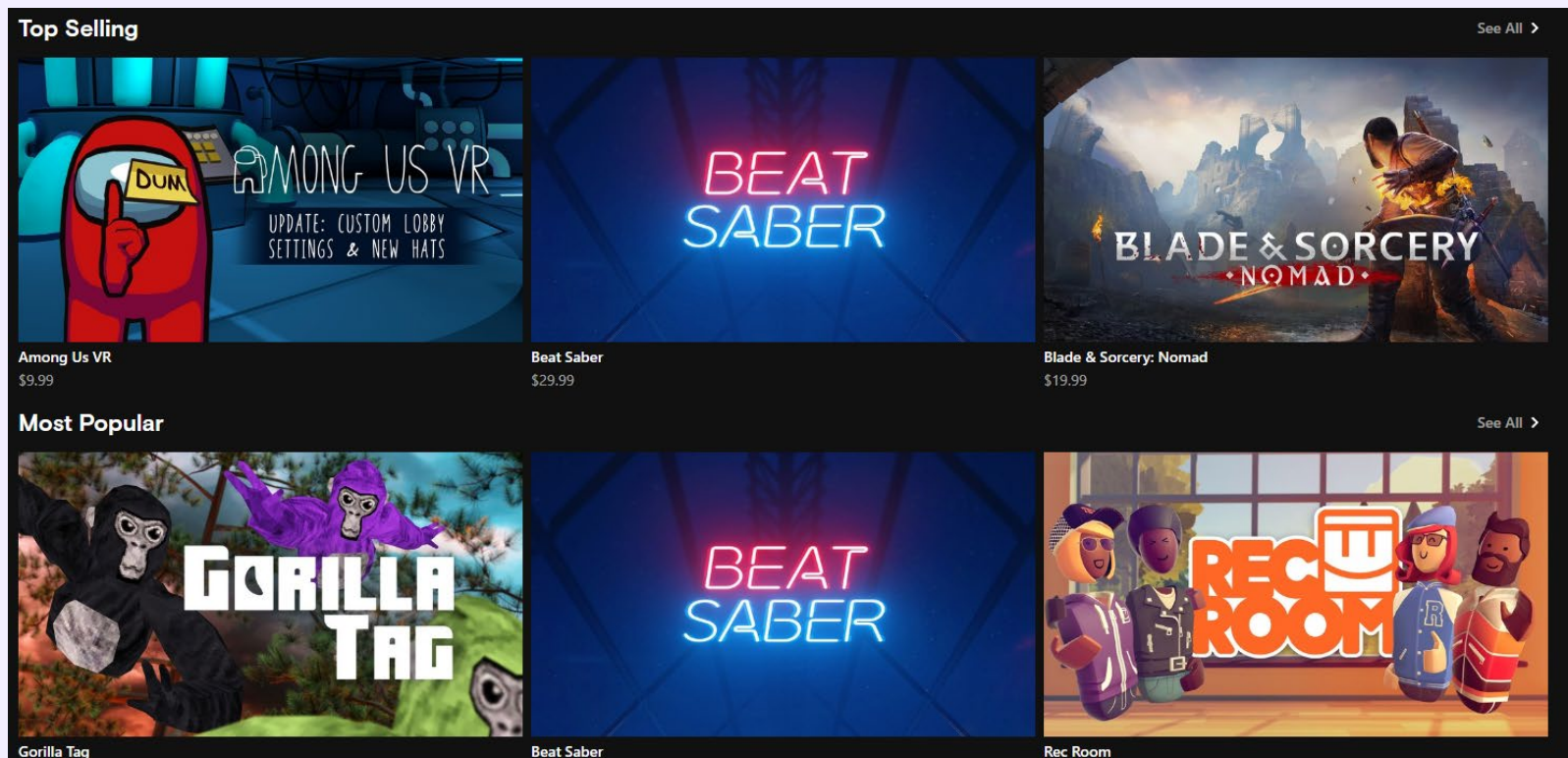
Immediate Perception



“I think one of the unique aspects of miniature golf is that it has the lowest possible gateway to entry. ‘I have a putter and a ball, let's do this!’”

- Don Carson, Sr Art Director Mighty Coconut

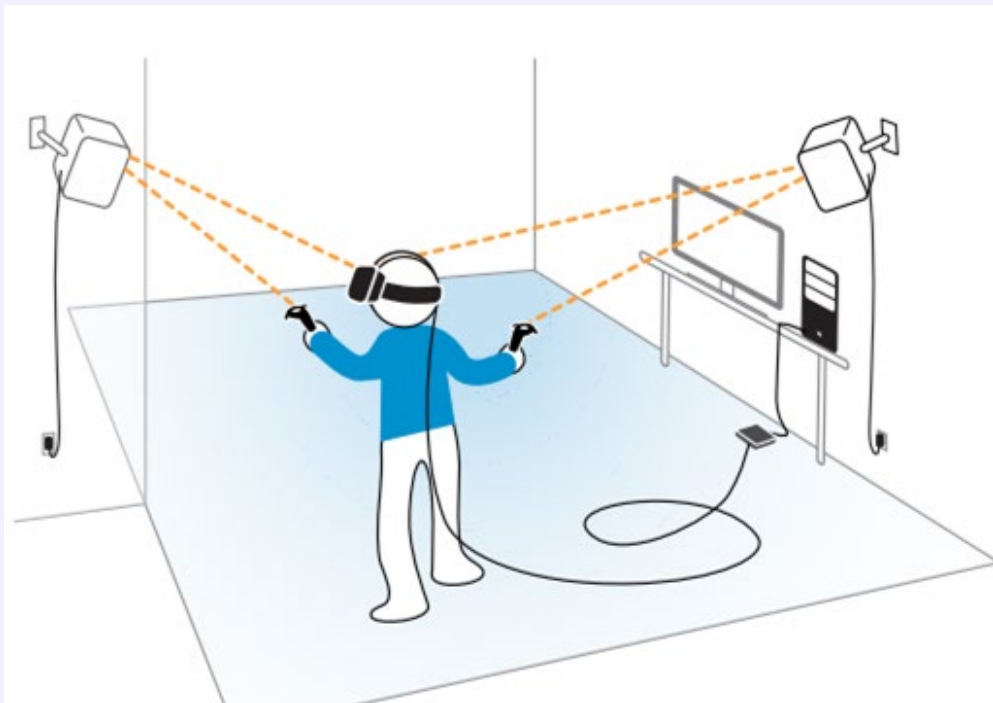
Explaining games to “non-gamers”



Narrow VR Audience



VR's History



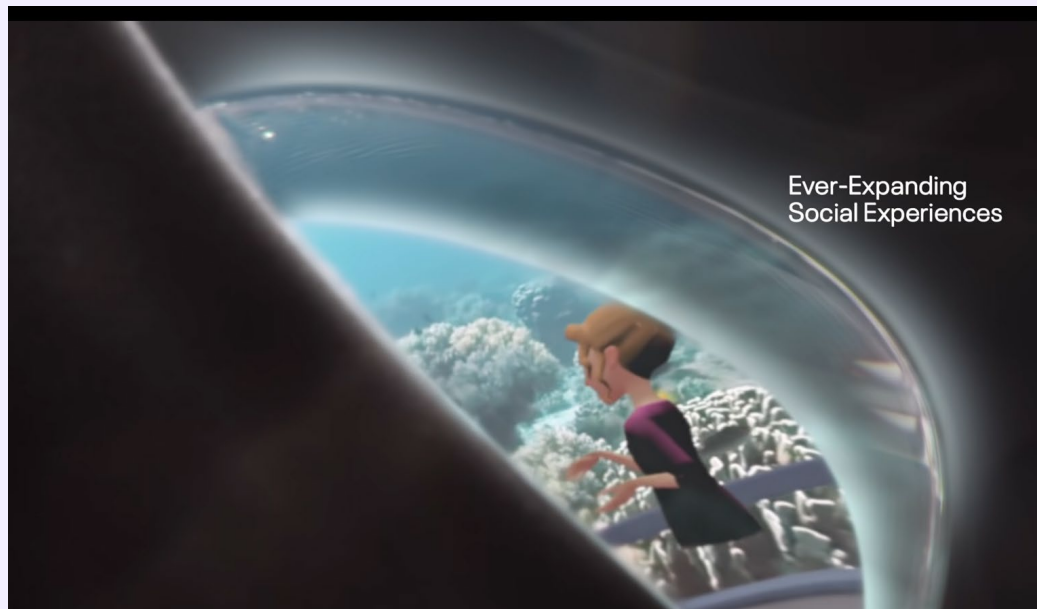
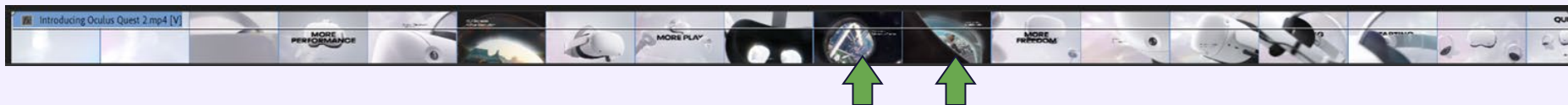
Current VR



How VR is Advertised



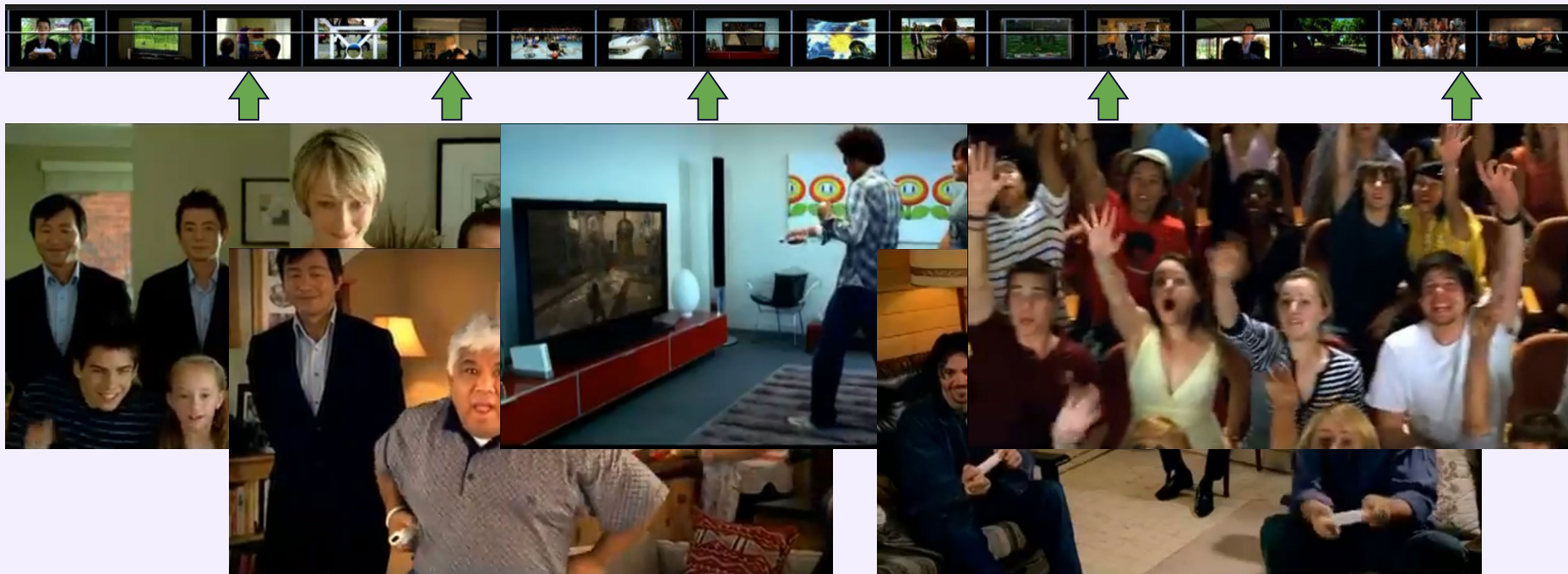
Quest 2 Ad



Casual System Advertisement



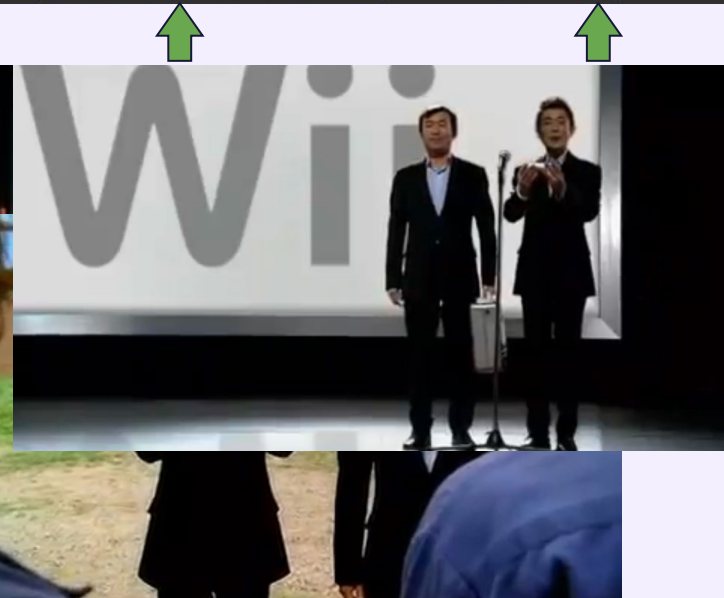
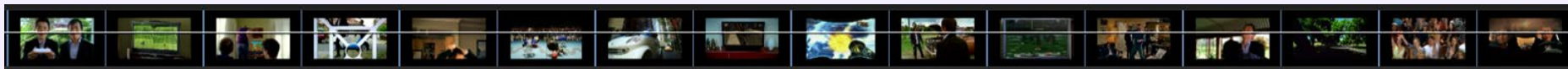
Casual System Advertisement



Casual System Advertisement



Casual System Advertisement



Conclusion



Critical Success

Financial Success

Thanks! Any Questions?

Slides:



tinyurl.com/RelaxingVR-GDC23

Thanks to our survey devs:

Eddie Lee, Founder, Funktronic Labs

Thomas Van Bouwel maker of Cubism

Martin Sivertsen, Game Director of Kartoffl from Breach VR

Michael Austin, Raccoon Lagoon, Founder, Hidden Path Entertainment

Don Carson, Sr Art Director of Walkabout Mini Golf from Mighty Coconut

Marko Permanto CTO & Linnéa Östedt Harrison Director of Garden of the Sea from Neat Corporation