

Media and Entertainment

20 industry experts share the trends they see shaping the M&E industry in 2021

Executive summary



The real world

Remote workflows

Enhanced storytelling

Visualization

Real-time pipelines

Immersive entertainment

Importance of creative expression

In the midst of the pandemic, M&E businesses rallied their collective resourcefulness – and technologies – to make sure the millions stuck at home could stay connected, informed, and entertained.

Virtual production, augmented and virtual reality, previsualization, remote workflows, and real-time pipelines all served to accelerate the rapid transformation to safer production sites, more creative experimentation, and entirely new ways of communicating, creating, connecting and working.

As the world continues to reopen and the entertainment industry blazes its path to recovery, they're also among the major trends that our panel of twenty leaders from across the M&E landscape believes will shape the industry in the post-pandemic era.

Immersive entertainment will change the way traditional M&E businesses think of the audience experience – and the production workflow. Video entertainment will consist of “an augmented reality interface to control, consume and interact with content.”^[1] Studios are “already thinking ahead to how these platforms will flow back into augmenting in-person physical destinations down the road.”^[2]

Real-time animation pipelines are becoming commonplace “for creators to do more with their craft, and deliver more value for their clients.”^[3] “Directors can make creative choices on the fly, as they would during live-action film production,”^[4] while the lingering demand by SVOD platforms for high volumes of content “will see animation studios looking for more efficient workflows.”^[5]

The importance of creative expression is not overshadowed by technology; in fact, it’s increasingly fueled by new innovations. Extended Reality (XR) tools, for instance, will have a significant impact on the creative process in almost every field where human creativity is key^[6], while a renaissance of handcrafted-looking art will drive technologists to engineer solutions that allow more creative experimentation.^[7]

Read on for more insights from 20 M&E experts on the trends they expect will define the new media and entertainment normal.

1 Robin Sho Moser, CEO, eyecandylab Corp.

2 Sally Reynolds, Creative Director, The Mill

3 Zachary Dixon, Co-Founder and ECD, IV Studio

4 Tim Williams, Director of R&D, Interactive, Super 78

5 Asa Movshovitz, MD/Animation Director, Keyframe Studios

6 Eloi Champagne, TD, Animation Studio, National Film Board of Canada

7 Maureen Fan, CEO, Baobab Studios

ANIMATION

**Tim Williams**

Director of Research &
Development, Interactive
[Super 78](#)

Real-time production is revolutionizing traditional animation

We anticipate that real-time animation, already widely used for previs and various other stages of production, will in 2021 be more widely adopted for producing final animation.

Although this production methodology is still in its infancy, we are already seeing bold moves in that direction; consider *WiNDUP*, an award-winning animated film created entirely in Unity, just released this past January.

Additionally, full performance capture in real-time, eliminating the long wait for rendering, will allow a creative team to review every detail within seconds. Directors can make creative choices on the fly, as they would during live-action film production.

Geppetto, Super 78's real-time animation system, was built on the Unity game engine to power "interactive character" theme park attractions. But we're already using Geppetto well outside of location-based entertainment.

"We are confident that feature-quality real-time animation will see significant growth in 2021 and 2022, upending the conventional time-consuming animation pipeline."





A new dawn for animation



Joel Edström
Head of production
[NENT Studios Animation](#)

Due to remote working, technical advancements and the growth of video streaming services, 2021 is the year the animation industry will experience a new dawn.

Animators and artists who've been restricted from the animation industry because of where they live may emerge to a different industry in front of them, when remote working is the new standard and hardware performance is accessible.

This has already sparked global competition – but more importantly, our creativity. We will therefore see more types of animated entertainment breaking traditional visual styles, exploring new storytelling formats, more diverse cultural portrayals, births of new target audiences, and a faster production speed to market.

"Talent from all around the world can now work together in real-time-projects with the most powerful toolsets, achieving visual quality and speed never experienced before."





Asa Movshovitz
MD/Animation Director
[Keyframe Studios](#)

Real-time all the time

Demand created by SVOD and AVOD platforms for a high volume of animated content – combined with tighter budgets from the traditional broadcasters – will see animation studios looking for a more efficient workflow to deliver their content.

The trend of using real-time content creation tools like Unity will become more commonplace, giving animation studios the ability to take on more and be more responsive to their clients.

What's more, adapting and changing the traditional CGI pipeline will mean moving to a more dynamic one, mainly to utilize the speed and the low cost of infrastructure afforded with real-time technology.

It will be even more widely accepted by larger studios once they have amortized their existing render infrastructure and as their artistic and technical talent master these game-changing tools.

"Smaller, more dynamic and tech-savvy studios that can easily change their workflows are already driving toward this industry shift."





Agencies will experience a year of “more”



Zachary Dixon
Co-Founder and Executive
Creative Director
iv.studio

What's really exciting as we transition out of slowdowns into a newly restarted world is the ability for smaller teams and even individual creators to do more with their craft, and deliver more value for their clients.

What used to be one 30 second spot for television is now a dozen deliverables spread across multiple platforms, mediums, and aspect ratios. We've been asked to deliver AR stickers, 360/VR films, and even small interactive experiences alongside our traditionally animated spots.

Unity is such an interesting platform right now in advertising, because it allows for the creation of all these different deliverables, all in one place.

“As a studio we've seen deliverables continue to multiply and expand.”



AR/VR/XR/LBE



Extended Creativity



Eloi Champagne

*Technical Director,
Animation Studio
[National Film Board
of Canada](#)*

In the coming years, extended reality will influence how creators work, where they work and how they share their end products. 2021 is the year we are seeing more evidence of this.

XR will enable independent creators and studios to be nimbler and more collaborative. VR applications in particular, combined with other real-time production tools, will facilitate the story development process and the pre-production of animated films and other types of projects.

Visual storytellers and content creators will be able to work in ways that are more artist-friendly, leading to better products faster and more cost effectively.

Through initiatives like the ONFB XP lab, the NFB Animation Studio is actively experimenting with tools and workflows that are going to simplify critical steps in previz and facilitate the creation of animatics or prototypes.

“Extended Reality will have a significant impact on the creative process in almost every field where human creativity is key.”





Maureen Fan
CEO
[Baobab Studios](#)

The rise of connected experiences meets the return of a hand-crafted look

With the success of virtual concerts in 2020, studios and audiences will embrace the next generation of interactive real-time performances, even as real-world events re-emerge. In virtual festivals, sports, performances – audiences will feel more connected, by being a part of these unique, animated worlds.

During this exciting animation renaissance, animators are experimenting with a different look and feel for their projects – one that feels more personal.

Wolfwalkers and *Klaus* show audience's love for hand-drawn animation. Sony Picture Animation's *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* explored graphical comic book ink. Audiences feel they can reach out and touch the scrapbook world of Dreamworks' *Trolls* and Netflix's *The Willoughbys* or the paper cut-out world of Baobab's *Baba Yaga*.

First generation CG animated films today are starting to show their age. However, these real-world projects will stand the test of time. These new looks will excite artists and audiences alike.

"Art will drive technologists to engineer solutions that allow creative experimentation."





Adding AR as the next layer of storytelling - and monetization



Robin Sho Moser
CEO

Video entertainment will become a truly connected experience - a system of interconnected devices within the user's vicinity, using an augmented reality (AR) interface to control, consume and interact with content. This trend is already growing in public recognition, as an Emmy® nomination in the outstanding innovation category for our last project shows.

More Connected: Initial trials connecting devices with TV via QR-codes, allowing viewers to transact on the content, have proven successful. TVs, phones, and AR glasses can be interconnected in a bi-directional manner.

More Social: Co-viewing and making content shareable, enjoyable with friends and family through avatars, and enabling viewer participation will gain relevance.

More Interactive: Inviting viewers to interact with AR content on either the storytelling layer or the commerce layer will add new revenue streams for media companies.



Lucy Trang Nguyen
VP Business Development

[Eyecandylab](#)

"We believe AR will be the glue that links video with richer content – for storytelling and monetization."





Stephen Stewart
Chief Technology Officer
[factory42](http://factory42.com)

Content is King – but creativity will reign

The COVID pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation process in many industries, and demonstrated that agile, digital-first organizations are most able to adapt to these changes.

The pace of technology advancements in the XR industries continues to accelerate, with the physical and digital worlds coming ever closer together.

Those agencies who push the boundaries of storytelling with ever-advancing tools are discovering they can take consumers to new worlds of enhanced reality – new worlds that, without XR, they'd never be able to visit in person.

The old adage of “content is king” remains – and in 2021, the importance of creativity, and the tools to enable more people to flex their creative muscles, will not only be as relevant as ever – but will also continue to grow.

“Agencies who push the boundaries of storytelling can take consumers to new worlds of enhanced reality.”





Getting people back out into the world



Susan Cummings

Co-Founder

fictioneers.co.uk

This year will be all about getting people back out again to public indoor and outdoor locations as we look to restart the world as we knew it before 2020.

To get people into museums, on to boats, into shopping malls, back to the beach -- meaning the re-emergence of the reasons we used to go, that we've missed.

But it's also going to mean exploring a whole new set of reasons to invite people back into the real world, including location-based augmented and mixed reality experiences which can be quickly and easily placed as differentiators for those locations as they compete for footfall.

People will begin to re-discover the world around them. Experiences will give memorable and lasting ways to explore what's around them.

"As the world continues to open up, this year will be all about the joyous and compelling reasons to get people back out again."





Immersive Broadcast Wars



With the broadcast marketplace getting ever more crowded, this year media companies will need to find new ways of elevating their content above their competitors in the battle for eyeballs.

Immersive technology powered by games engines like Unity will be key to their success, providing broadcasters with rich, engaging features such as volumetric performance presentation, data overlays, synchronized co-viewing and gamification, and allowing these companies to work with both their traditional content types plus fully immersive content streams using 180 and 360 degree camera technology.

Matt McCartney
Head of Immersive
Technology
[Sky](#)

These features are going to be even more important as AR smartwear comes to market over the next few years.

"With new AR hardware, in combination with 5G and cloud computing, media consumption – indeed, data consumption – will take on entirely new dimensions."





Sally Reynolds
Creative Director
[The Mill](#)

Innovation and evolution accelerate during times of conditional change, scant resources or stress.

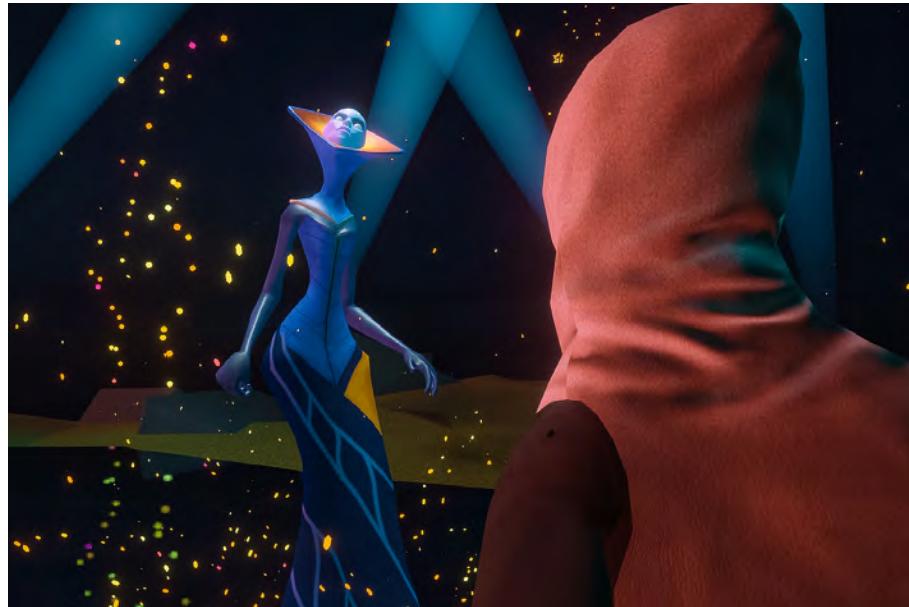
The largest trend lifting the entire film and linear production supply chain right now is virtual production.

Virtual production is changing how we write for the content itself, to how we run pre-pro and how we film, through to paradigm-changing real-time VFX and post pipelines.

No sooner are we developing virtual events than we are already thinking ahead to how these platforms flow back into augmenting in-person physical destinations down the road.

And beyond utility, XR will increasingly offer key ecosystems for brands to get right, in order to engage their end customers.

"Beyond utility, XR will increasingly offer key ecosystems for brands to get right, in order to engage their end customers."





Ray Soto
Director, Emerging Tech
[USA Today Network](#)

Audiences will expect new forms of technology-driven storytelling

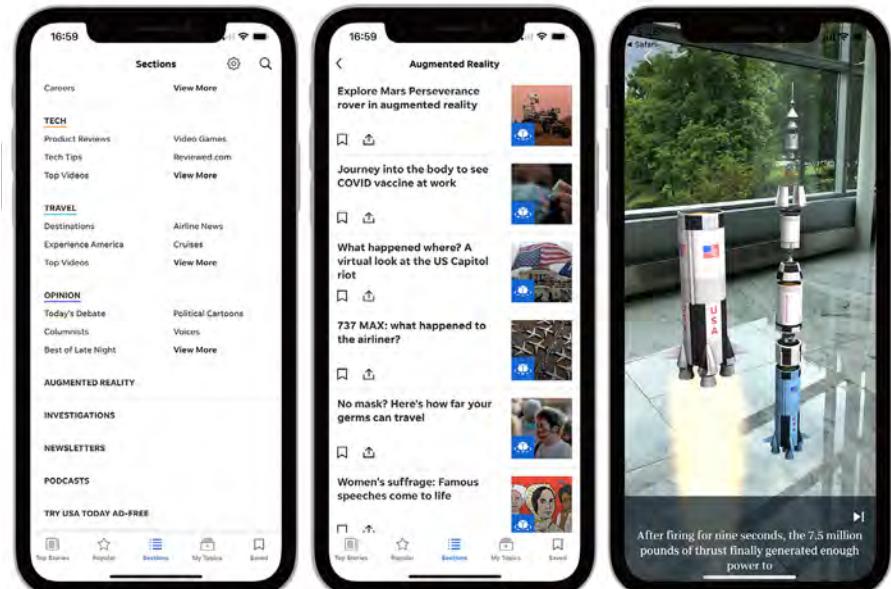
Last year proved to be an amazing year for interactive storytelling within the media and journalism industry.

From local to national, the industry's audience engaged with interactive projects that explored complex topics in ways that had never been done before. From augmented reality to interacting with complex data visualizations in 3D, audiences will continue to expect new forms of technology-driven stories in 2021.

To meet audience needs for premium content experiences, organizations themselves will transform. Teams with non-traditional journalism backgrounds will be created to develop interactive content that resonates with a growing diverse and tech-savvy audience.

This will be an exciting year for an industry that is eager to evolve with technology, but it will also prove to be one of its most challenging.

“Organizations will develop a stronger culture of experimentation and rapid iteration.”



sugar CREATIVE



Will Humphrey
Director, Creative
Innovation
[Sugar Creative](#)

Traveling within time, space, and the imagination will become a central element of experiences

The creative application of immersive technology has seen incredible growth over the last year. An evolution of the underpinning technology and its relative stabilization in terms of update frequency has led to more robust and accessible applications. Alongside this a wider cultural impetus – in terms of interest in who we are, where we came from, and where as society we are going – has created a tangible interest in the ways we can use immersive technology to explore these questions.

We expect that these will converge in the next 12 months, with immersive-focused creators looking to give users the ability to experience imagined stories and factual content that travel within time, space, and the imagination.

With this realisation, the conversation around immersive technology will change, bringing these emerging technologies to the forefront of communication and engagement.

"The conversation around immersive technology will change in the next year from 'what does it do?' to 'what is it saying?'"



Broadcast





Remote production capabilities for a post-Covid 'new normal'



Benjamin Causse
SVP, Business Development & Account Management | Sport Experiences

[Deltatre](#)

The media and entertainment world has shown remarkable resilience to the changes that the pandemic has brought to our lives.

Most notably, it has accelerated digital transformation and compelled momentum towards moving to operational workflows that can be managed from remote locations.

The benefits of remote production are significant, offering the possibility of reducing the cost of travel, logistics, and the requirement of physical space at a customer's premises. This means that companies can offer to deploy bare-metal servers at their own premises, remotely connect operations teams, or offer a fully digital production in the cloud.

With ongoing innovation, especially with an eye toward 5G connectivity and environmental benefits, 2021 will represent a significant milestone towards new remote production capabilities that may become the norm sooner than later.

"This year will come to represent a significant milestone for capabilities that may become the norm sooner than later."





Thomas Desmeules
CTO
[Astucemedia](#)

Data will elevate the impact of visual storytelling

The last year or two have seen an explosion of developments in photorealism and mixed-reality rendering. As the breadth of datasets expands, so do the possibilities for dynamic visualisation and interactivity.

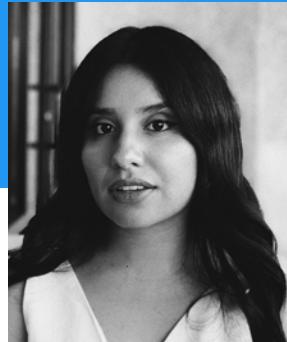
Data-Driven Graphics has long been at the center of Astucemedia – it permeates everything we do. As the broadcast industry shifts perspective towards the storytelling experience, the trend we're seeing is engaging content that relies on data and graphics be intertwined. Rendered and delivered in real-time.

Expect to see the viewer experience increasingly enhanced with layers of data that offer both macro and meta expansions; for example, more drill-down statistics in tandem with high-level content whose relationship to the story may be unexpected at first glance, but is revealed through data storytelling. We see this layering-of-data trend spanning all domains, notably in finance, sports, elections and interactive experiences.

"We've seen tremendous growth in viewer appetite for richer datasets that tell a deeper story."



VIRTUAL PRODUCTION



Andrea Aniceto-Chavez
Producer
[Digitalfilm Tree](#)

Visualization will supercharge more productions

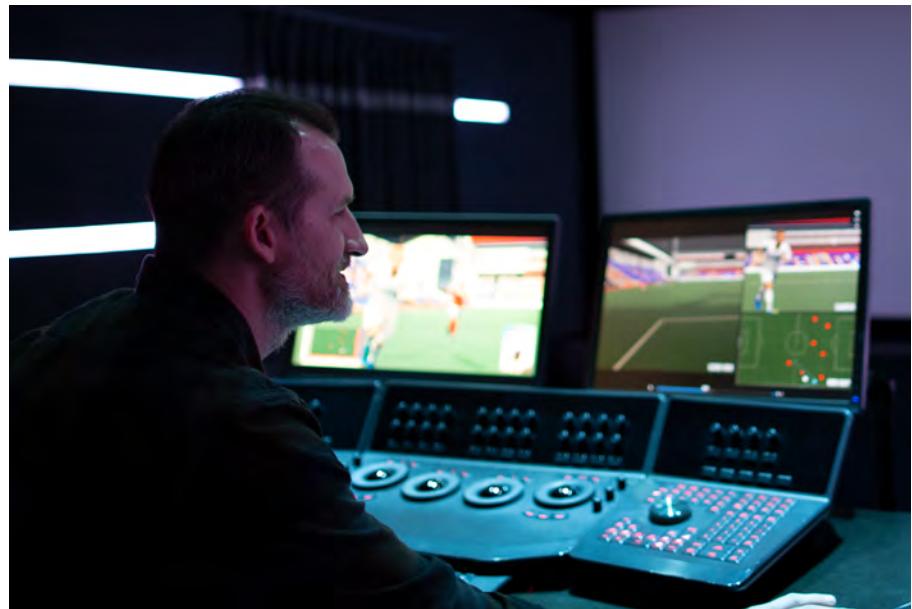
Virtual production is a term most often applied to blockbuster productions, which incorporate Previs, Techvis, and SafetyVis to imagine new workflows and complex scenes before physical work begins.

In 2021, these valuable visualization technologies are relevant to all levels of production – scripted and non-scripted television, animation, and Indie budget filmmaking.

This is playing out in two ways for our Cinecode clients. First, Apple's introduction of Lidar on their devices has supercharged Cinecode's ability to provide remarkably in-depth LiDAR scans at a substantially reduced cost and with less planning or manpower to accomplish well, opening the door for more collaborative teams, a better depth of pre-production planning which helps the bottom line, and creative outcomes.

Second, economies of scale will benefit more productions. Our animators and developers work in tandem on tools, some of which can be show-specific, while others have a broader appeal. Inevitably, both are empowering clients at the speeds they need to produce.

"Visualization technologies will become seamlessly integrated with more productions of any scale."



MAGNOPUS



Lap Van Luu
CTO
[Magnopus](#)

The convergence of virtual and real

After emerging from the isolation of last year, people want to feel normal; to feel connected.

They're exploring new home purchases, going to virtual concerts, dreaming of vacations, hoping to create new memories. Those memories – those connections – can now be created in a physical or digital world, or both. For the media and entertainment industry, 2021 will be the year Virtual Production, Digital Twins, and Connected Spaces converge.

In Connected Spaces, both the digital and physical are one and the same. Through virtual production technology, consumers will be able to go a concert at their favorite venue in a Connected Space. Digital users will attend by visiting a Digital Twin, while physical users will visit the location in person. And both audiences enjoy the same entertainment, together.

"If there's one thing that the pandemic has taught us, we all can connect socially and create just as meaningful memories through a digital connection in 2021 and beyond."



MAGNOPUS

The emergence of virtual personas



Sally Slade
Lead AR/VR Developer
[Magnopus](#)

Content creators are often pressured to streamline their brand; to create their signature style, and stick with it. When an individual feels like pushing boundaries, they may insulate their existing body of work by publishing under a new name – an alias, or a secret pen name.

Likewise, as creatives feel pressure from society to conform, we may desire alternative outlets for creative or professional self-expression.

Enter the Virtual Persona – the “Virsona.”

In 2021, we can create entire fictive personalities as platforms for our content. These “Virsonas” can host talk shows, release albums, or chat in real-time with fans. They can offer a shield of anonymity, or act as amplifiers towards an existing person or message.

Just as we watched the rise of Bloggers and Podcasters, the era of VTubers (broadcasters of video content via Virtual Personas) is now upon us.

“With today’s Virtual Production techniques and avatar builders, it’s increasingly accessible to forge and puppeteer custom characters.”





Storytelling will drive innovation



Christian Faber
Creative Director
and Founder
rig21.dk

Businesses coming back into full production in 2021 won't want to rush into big investments, especially investments they can't use until a project comes around that leverages them. It will begin to shift the other way around.

Here at Rig21, instead of leading with tech, first we explore a certain effect or a specific scene. When we eventually do buy the software or equipment, it's almost like Christmas – the anticipation of finally using it and seeing how it works – in service of our creativity. It's how we can maximize our investments, instead of getting a lot of technology and then waiting around for the right project to fit the tech.

We see creativity as being first. This is what will attract the skilled people who bring talent and vision and creative ideas into the studio. Only then will the investments in tools and technology follow.

"The visuals, the storytelling, the engagement – that's what drives innovation and development of the studio."





Dane Allan Smith
Vice President – Creative
[The Third Floor inc](#)

“Adding pre-visualization directly into the creative process will allow creatives to communicate their vision, while enabling more accurate financial models in advance.”

Deconstructing the M+E production model

The traditional studio production model favors computer generated imagery as a postproduction process; while the art department, responsible for the physical build, starts on day one. Green screen is an established, well-understood technology that post people use to optimize the scene and overcome its shortcomings.

But just walk onto a set with a LED video wall, driven by tools and processes only made possible with game engine technology, and you realize where we are headed: The physical and digital co-exist.

We think studios will begin adopting pre-visualization initiatives directly into the creative process – allowing creatives to take the written word, visualize it, put it up on a screen, and communicate their vision with all the department heads, before committing to final content creation.

This serves creatives, but also allows financial models to derive true costs much earlier in the process than the previous pipeline allows. All while providing an environment that fosters creativity.



Make your M&E vision a reality.

From workflow and integration to training and support, Unity can help you with everything you need to transform your business for the new era of media and entertainment creation.

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