

Customer Development Research Assignment



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Product Overview

The idea

The premise is to recreate the experience of a guided audio tour one might take at a historical or natural monument such that one can enjoy it from the comfort of their homes. With the use of VR videography and traditional cinematography techniques, it is feasible to develop immersive VR experiences that are exciting and educational. When compiled, an increasing catalog of VR tours for different places will be available for either download or streaming on the company website and the mobile app. With VR going mainstream, the tours could be made available directly on Google Play and the Apple store in a VR content section subsequently. Based on the current capabilities and limitations of VR recording equipment, the tours could have pre-set checkpoints along the path taken, or possibly give the user the ability to 'walk' on a pre-set path as they wish, all while offering a 360 degree view of the surroundings. Ambient sounds and guide prompts will be added to increase immersion and provide an educational experience. Access to a VR headset is a prerequisite to avail the full features of the product. The tours will be optimized for a specific, high quality headset, say an Oculus, but will be available to view on all VR headsets with only a slight difference in quality.

Where did it come from?

The idea came from the need for having an immersive technology that can substitute real travel to some extent for a fraction of the time and money invested. In a post Coronavirus world with more cautious travel and unstable economies, a technology like this appears to be lucrative.

Why does it have merit?

The key reason this idea holds merit is that the product offers immersive experiences in the form of tours of famous landmarks that can substitute the real experience to some degree, via the novel and exciting experience that virtual reality offers in its own right. With guided VR tours, one can virtually be transported to famous landmarks around the world while seated in the comfort of their homes. Travelling to exciting places is something that people across the globe crave. Further, the recent pandemic and its effects on the world make the idea ever more relevant.

MVP Discussion

MVP representation

For my Minimum Viable Product (MVP), I decided to make a Google Slides presentation to explain the features of the idea. The presentation is 13 slides long and can be watched in under 5 minutes. In the presentation, I attempt to explain the experience of the product from a broad scale and then give a specific example to help envision what a VR tour might look and feel like. I finish off my presentation by mentioning the hardware requirements and the costing model for the product. The presentation is designed to be short, easy to understand and convenient to view. The use of Google Slides allowed me to simply post the link to the presentation anywhere and all a user has to do is click and watch. A slight downside is having to navigate back and forth between the presentation and Google Earth, but I believe it is a necessary detour to get a more accurate idea of the product. A link to the survey is included at the end of the presentation for convenience.

Customer understanding

I tested the primary hypothesis, "It costs a lot of time and money to travel to cool places, so it would be nice to have some technology to compensate for it to a certain extent." The survey-takers understood the concept across the board, however, a key point they misunderstood is the level of detail and quality I envision the final product to have. Since the examples shown in the presentation are not very high quality or absolutely breathtaking, they fail to fully capture the imagination of some of the audience. The audience understood all the features, though it is possible that a large percentage of them didn't test the presented samples to their full extent, or completely grasped the versatility of the product. All the features listed were unanimously liked and agreed upon. A few improvements such as the presence of a virtual guide, and optional features such as group tours and a day/ night mode toggle were requested fairly heavily.

One of my assumptions that were tested is that people would appreciate nature walks and hikes more, if not the same as museum and monument tours. I was forced to rethink this assumption as a user mentioned that they would be interested in the product if there were museum tours. On the other hand, another assumption I made about the demographic in terms of age and sex was validated as most of the respondents were young, tech enthusiast men.

Customer Research

Before getting into the details of the customer research and key insights gained from it, I would like to acknowledge that the sample size and selection of survey-takers massively affects the outcome of the survey. It is a generally accepted fact that the more data one has, the better insights they can generate. That being said, having some data is far better than having no data, and can still go a long way in gaining insights about the product, and even how to expand the reach of the survey.

Who did I talk to?

I enlisted the help of four different social networks to gain meaningful feedback about my product idea, namely *Reddit*, *Facebook*, *Discord*, and my *personal social network*. On Reddit, I made posts explaining myself, linking the presentation, the survey, and thanking the survey-takers for their time, in four different subreddits. They were r/virtualreality, r/oculus, r/PSVR, r/Vive. The posts on three of them were fine but one of them (the one on r/Vive) was taken down as I was a rookie member and didn't have posting privileges yet. Similarly, I made posts in 3 different Facebook groups. The first group is a group for ENTJ MTBI type people, the second a spirituality group, and the third an intellectual meme group. Though not necessarily the target audience, these groups represent a cross section of society which may still provide valuable insights. I also attempted to join a couple of VR groups on Facebook but my requests were not approved. All these subreddits and groups have membership numbers ranging from 2k to 250k. Additionally, I requested online members on multiple channels of the Virtual Reality discord server to take the survey.

How did I find them?

At first, I sought to find people that I thought were in the target market by looking for large online forums of tech and VR enthusiasts. This led me to find a few promising subreddits on Reddit. Subreddits related to VR experiences were easy to find once I searched for some keywords. One of the subreddits (r/virtualreality) has a link to the virtual reality Discord server pinned at the top. On exploring further, this server turned out to be a massive community of VR enthusiasts, with dedicated channels to talk about any and everything VR. I requested the online members in a few channels to help me out but they were typically snobbish and sceptical. I was subsequently muted for 12 hours for supposedly spamming the presentation and survey link (I wasn't spamming). Nevertheless, I think I got at least a couple responses out of this exercise. I also posted in 3 Facebook groups I was already a part of, so I didn't

technically find new people, although I tried to join 2 VR related Facebook groups but my requests were not approved.

What they have to say: Key Findings

There are three categories of findings resulting from the survey, the first providing insights about the survey itself, the second about the customers' demographics, and the third about the product idea.

A few insights about the survey and its response rate were gained by engaging in the process of finding members of the target audience to take it. The most significant of these insights is the surprisingly low response rate, in spite of exposing over 500,000 people with the product idea and survey in clear, concise fashion. I

hypothesise that a key reason for this is that people are much more likely to just take a quick survey than to have to watch a presentation before taking one. In my opinion, the way to go to drastically improve the response rate is to publish a free, high quality demo tour on the internet and ask for feedback at the end of it. This way, the correct audience is reached and interacting with the idea and giving feedback based on it would no longer feel like a chore. The final sample size ended up being small, and barely respectable at only 15. That being said, it is very obvious that in spite of targeting the correct audience, the small amount of responses most likely paint an inaccurate picture of the product's perception in some aspects. Nevertheless, the data is still insightful to an extent and sheds more light on the general perception of the product, validating or invalidating assumptions made by me. Everyone who took the survey completed it. The reason for that seems to be that once someone is invested enough to watch a presentation, they most likely follow up by completing the survey. A few respondents predictably skipped non-mandatory short answer questions, most likely due to laziness and lack of feeling of responsibility.

Coming to demographic insights gained from the survey, a very clear picture of who a typical customer would be emerges. A majority of the respondents are under 25 years old, have at least a moderate grasp over technology, and are mostly from North America. 12 out of 15 of the respondents are men, with the majority of them deeming VR technology to be affordable if they save up for it. The results are indicative that young, tech enthusiast men with at least some disposable income are the ideal target audience.

Finally coming to insights about the product itself, there is much to discuss. In terms of trends seen, the general consensus on features such as guide audio, scenic viewpoints, ambient sounds, and walkable paths is all positive. It was found that it is not yet clear what kind of tour would a majority of the people be interested in, but some responses suggest that this format of tours might be better suited for museums and historic monuments. My assumption that people would enjoy nature tours more than others failed to hold true. More research into what kind of tours people would

like to see will be essential to picking the right first demo tour to bring to market. Further, key insight gained is that even though the initial reaction to the product is somewhat positive, I got the impression that people were generally only slightly on the positive side of the fence in terms of acceptance and eventual adoption. The data also very clearly suggests that the respondents believed that the product idea was sort of innovative but not earth shattering, something I agree with. Additionally, there was encouragement for improvements and refinements to the existing features, and also a demand for new features such as controllable lighting, a VR guide, group tours, and incorporating 3D models.

Summary of audience reaction

All things considered, the general perception of the audience to the product idea can be described as somewhat positive. The audience appears willing to give the product a chance in the next few years if they were given a persuasive enough reason to. This also hints at the need for an improved presentation in the short term, and a high quality, carefully made demo at the product idea nears commercialization as capturing the customers' imagination is crucial to them buying into it. I see potential in the idea if the right decisions to satisfy customers are made. Going forward, core features of the tours will be preserved, and enhanced in some cases, while work to get a demo tour made is done simultaneously. Further, it is a prudent strategy to create tours based on community feedback rather than on what an individual may find interesting.

Conclusion

Verdict

The verdict on the idea is that it has potential. Provided that close attention is paid to customer reception and feedback, the idea can grow to become a successful product. In the immediate short term, better communication of the idea via a video or a better presentation, and gathering extensive feedback should be the focus. This will allow the idea to evolve further and pivot in a data driven way.

Next steps

Based on the feedback received, the next iteration of the product idea will involve some modifications. Firstly, a significantly dramatic and breath-taking location, such as the Taj Mahal or the Great Pyramid of Giza will be shown as an example. A hike along Vancouver Island didn't seem to do it for a lot of people. No features will be dropped, with the possibility of the addition of a couple such as controllable lighting and group tours. The product will be marketed towards young tech enthusiasts with

some disposable income and the primary focus of the idea pitch and the product itself should be to really capture their imagination. Finally, I would have to do a thorough study of VR videography techniques and network with individuals who might be able to assist me with further development of the product.

Appendix A: MVP Evidence

[Immersion VR Tours MVP Presentation](#)

Appendix B: SurveyMonkey Questionnaire

[SurveyMonkey Questionnaire](#)

Appendix C: Survey results

A pdf file containing survey data has been uploaded alongside the report.