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5 Answers with Francesca Panetta, The Guardian

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) November 14, 2017

This fall, The Guardian gave away 100,000 Google cardboard headsets as part of their virtual reality program. The paper started its VR team last year and so far, the viewer reaction has been extremely positive, with the most popular experiences being Arctic 360 and First Impressions. We caught up with Fran Panetta, executive editor of VR, to talk about the technology and immersive storytelling.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE VR EXPERIENCE YOU PROVIDE?



Credit: The Guardian

The Guardian's VR pieces are focused on first-person storytelling – offering viewers the opportunity to experience unique encounters and allowing them to see the world from a different perspective while becoming fully immersed and involved in a story. We're excited about the new perspectives and challenges that VR can bring and view it as an opportunity for viewers to 'learn by doing' – a kind of embodied journalism. The use of first-person perspective in all of our VR pieces enables the viewer to step inside the story. This is something that is unique to the medium of VR and we're excited to see where we can take this.

WHAT DOES VR ADD TO TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM?

VR is a very different type of storytelling and there has to be a reason to place the viewer in a particular situation. The pieces can take [from] a few weeks to a year to make—depending on the complexity and ambition of the piece. It's an incredibly visceral and experiential medium and if the story benefits from having the viewer there on location, it can be powerful, giving viewers a chance to see and experience things that they wouldn't ordinarily be able to.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD VR EXPERIENCE?

This can vary widely depending on the particular piece of VR journalism and what the viewer is looking to get out of it. In general terms, a good piece of VR journalism would allow the viewer to experience something that they wouldn't be able to access in day-to-day life, opening their eyes to different locations and experiences.

WHY DID THE GUARDIAN DECIDE TO INVEST IN VR OVER OTHER TECHNOLOGY?

The Guardian is dedicated to digital innovation and, as a news organization, we have been early to VR. In doing so we are helping to form what VR journalism looks like. It's all about being innovative, testing and pushing boundaries to be at the forefront of what is a very exciting time – marrying The Guardian's experience of quality journalism with innovative storytelling.

TECHNOLOGY IS MOVING AT A BREAK-NECK PACE. WHAT ARE THE TECHNOLOGICAL HOLES IN VR THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE FIXED IN THE FUTURE?

We're excited about the development of wearables and believe this could really change the landscape of both VR and AR.



Kirsten Ballard



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CONTACT US

4401 N. Fairfax Dr.
Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22203

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info@newsmediaalliance.org

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