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Plug into the future of Entertainment and Communication: Virtual Reality

 Many times we have seen the impossible become possible, fantasy become reality, science fiction become fact; and this trend is one that will continue into the future. At this time we have a resurgence of the beloved sci-fi phenomenon known as virtual reality. Sure we have seen it in plenty of movies, and used in multiple different ways both with positive and negative impacts on the world. We see in the movie *The Matrix* a virtual reality that is used to enslave the human race, and although the virtual reality emerging today is nowhere near the complexity of a Matrix style of machine, but it is the beginning. We also see virtual reality as a very beneficial thing, such as in Star Trek and the famed holodeck. Today, we have the beginnings of such devices, and it is my personal opinion that this technology is going to be very impactful on not only entertainment, but also education, communication, and many other fields once implemented correctly.

 First, explaining that virtual reality is not a new thing would be beneficial to understanding why the current resurgence is so impressive. Virtual Reality is actually not a new thing; the beginning of “virtual reality” actually started during the 1950’s. A man by the name of **Morton Heilig developed a machine known as the sensorama. The sensorama was the very first device that was used to put someone in another state, or**

**experience a world that they were not currently living in** ("History of Virtual Reality")**. However, this large and clunky machine never really caught on with the general public. This was also true for the many very primitive virtual reality devices that would come out in the future. Now, the time has come for the resurgence of this type of product once again, but this time there’s a little more leverage in keeping it from becoming a passing fad like the many before it.**

 **The Oculus Rift was announced in mid-2013, and more than likely the average consumer hasn’t heard of this product at all. However, the Rift has been what makes virtual reality seem like it’s going to be a part of the real world. Still under development, the Oculus Rift has been through at least three different iterations in the two to three years it’s been in the eye of the computer world after its announcement in 2013. Using newly developed motion tracking software, and high definition LCD screens in its display, this machine is not the outdated fad virtual reality machines of the late 1900’s, especially the 1990’s**("Oculus Rift (developer kit)").**It amazed gaming journalists at places like PAX (The Consumer Gaming Conference), and other places like CES (The Consumer Electronic Show) (“Oculus at CES”). This device sparked a maelstrom in the gaming industry, and now Sony has their own virtual reality device under development under the codename Morpheus. All of this positive feedback by leading industry journalists for both Morpheus and the Rift showed great promise for the virtual reality medium. So much so Facebook spent $2 billion to acquire Oculus Rift (Solomon). Putting that much money into one asset means that the social media giant has faith that the Rift is going places. With Facebook being the one that developed the innovative way we connect socially, it is very easy to see them using the Rift to do the same with communication and entertainment. Mark Zuckerburg CEO of Facebook states that his mission with the Rift and virtual reality in general is that it** “allows us all to experience the impossible” which shows you this technology genius is ready to take on this field head on (Bernstein). **The flexibility of virtual reality application in numerous fields is why I see it being a major player in the everyday lives of people in the future.**

 **Many people view virtual reality solely as nerd based gaming machine, but this is definitely not the case. There are numerous fields that can be greatly improved upon with the help of virtual reality. Gaming, of course, is a major one that is blatantly obvious. Gamers like to be immersed in their environments, and with virtual reality they can be transported to a new world. They can experience stories and gameplay that was once thought to be impossible, and as we make advances in the technology for virtual reality these only get better. Another field that will benefit greatly from virtual reality is education. Imagine being a doctor going in to do a surgery on a live patient for a first time. This is a totally new experience compared to the dead cadaver you cut up to see if you can use a scalpel or not. However, virtual reality is already being used to give training on simulated bodies, and that is very valuable for first time doctors. Given that the simulated body in the virtual reality simulation responds much like a real person would to a certain cut or incision, and this is invaluable for the training of the people who are actually going to operate on you (McCloy).**

**In addition, communication and virtual tourism have been thought to be very big possible fields that virtual reality could dominate. How many fathers have missed the birth of their child? How many people regret not being in the room whenever the child has their first birthday? Virtual Reality can bridge the distance gap, and let people truly experience the moment they might have regretted. Samsung recently set up this sort of experience for an Australian family who was separated. They used their newly released virtual reality device known as Gear VR to help a man experience his child’s birth. He was able to be fully immersed in the moment, and even moving his head to look and talk to other people inside the hospital room (Goldman). This is the true power virtual reality can bring to our lives, and with more development the technology will only make the experience more and more immersive.**

 **Virtual Reality is the future for numerous reasons, but the biggest being that it’s cool. Many people when they first put on the Rift are amazed to see that sci-fi that has come to life. The amazing part is the amount of amazement for this prototype; this isn’t even the final product. The application of this awesome technology applies to multiple fields, so unlike the fad it could have been it has potential to be a universally adopted device. This only happens however with the help of early adopters and the development of newer and better technology advancing the virtual reality machines. If that happens and the trend continues, one day virtual reality could be as common place as a cell phone. So when the Rift or Morpheus comes to market give it a try, because you could be experiencing the beginning of the future.**