

Mercedes-Benz SA embraces VR technology

Mercedes-Benz South Africa's (MBSA) visual effects and animation agency, Sinister Studio, has created a number of virtual reality campaigns - including four test-drive videos - to profile the cars' features in ways not previously possible.



The first video showcases the new Mercedes-Benz C-Class Coupé and the second the new E-Class.

The third campaign sees the Mercedes-AMG C 63 being tested at high speed at the Kyalami racetrack. Again, computer graphics and 360-degree film combined to create a fantastical experience. The producers later superimposed Lewis Hamilton, F1 racing driver, into the test drive. The success of this approach is reportedly entirely due to the technology that was used.

The fourth brief was to launch the new range of Mercedes-Benz roadsters and cabriolets by bringing to life the sense of child-like wonder embodied in the range.

The agency decided to use virtual reality to expand on Mercedes-Benz's global television campaign, and its #LookUp campaign. It pushed the boundaries of what virtual reality had been used in the past and made an experience based on fantasy.

"The tricky part of filming cars," says Christian van der Walt, Sinister's CEO, "is that there are lighting and depth of field issues to reconcile. When filming, the interior of a vehicle is generally darker than the environment it's being driven in and this needs to be compensated for. So what we did was use a 'pod' of cameras to shoot a 360-degree view of the outside world, and then we completely created the cars' interiors with computer graphics. This allowed us to seamlessly integrate the two aspects."

But the fourth video - featuring the Mercedes-Benz C-Class Cabriolet - pulled all the elements together in an overlay of characters, fantasy and animation that we've never seen done before.

"This digital world is truly experiential and allows viewers to 'feel' as if they are the protagonist of the journey. Our video incorporates fantasy creatures similar to those in the global commercial, which takes the virtual experience to the next level."

As a teaser, Sinister Studios filmed a short video featuring three children and a dog in the back of a cabriolet. The children were asked how they felt driving in the vehicle and what they saw when they were asked to #LookUp, and their responses were amazing. "animals without feet" and "it feels like I'm on a bubble that's flying away". Their thoughts and words were used in the virtual reality to physically portray what they saw and express how they felt.

Says Selvin Govender, marketing director, Mercedes-Benz Cars, "Users are able to view the content as a 360-degree video on their PCs, smartphones and tablets, or they can familiarise themselves with the full virtual reality experience on devices such as the Samsung Gear VR or even the Google cardboard, using their own mobile devices."

"We believe that virtual reality could offer fans and customers the convenience of having an incredible experience that could come as close as possible to driving and enjoying the thrill of a new product, while in the convenience of their homes with their personal devices," says Govender.

"The innovation rests on the rendering of a virtual reality test drive in 3D graphics, in a fantasy realm that allows you to immerse yourself in the world of Mercedes-Benz. We're not just pushing product, we're giving people an experience," concluded Govender.

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