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# IMMERSIVE FAN EXPERIENCE AT MEDIAPOLIS

## How Did Fans Like Meeting Their Favourite Characters in a VR Scene?

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### THE FANS OF THE FINNISH TV SERIES

Uusi Päivä, UP, were offered an immersive fan experience at Mediapolis in April 2017. The objective of the experiment was to understand how VR, in this case 360° video, can be utilized for enhancing the customer experience during audience tours organized at the Mediapolis Studios. Yle, Aito Tehdas, Rakka Creative, TAMK and the MEDAIA project collaborated together to shoot and edit a 360° video scene in a UP studio set. Next, a user test event was organized at Mediapolis for the fans of the TV series. Two weeks later, the fans were asked to answer a post-event survey. The purpose of this article is to describe and analyze the results of the user test and to summarize what was learned from the experiment.



PICTURE: ULLA BROHOLM, YLE

### ONE OF THE FOCUS AREAS OF MEDIAPOLIS

is to innovate and develop media tourism. In the Immersive Fan Experience experiment, the collaborators wanted to test whether VR can provide added value to audience tours organized at Mediapolis. Uusi Päivä ('New Day' in English) is a very popular daily Finnish TV series produced at the biggest studio of Mediapolis. The fans of UP were chosen to be the target group, as they were known to eagerly take part in events organized for them.

A virtual reality scene was written and shot separate from the normal plot of UP. The three-minute scene featured fan-favorite characters Krista and Reino, who were playing with a miniature car track and invited the spectator to join in the conversation at the end. The VR scene was made simple to ensure that this new experience would suit well with the audience tour.

The role of MEDAIA in the experiment was to study how fans experience the virtual scene. Rakka Creative and Aito Tehdas were responsible for the VR production, and Yle coordinated the project and organized the test event. The test event and the fan surveys were created in collaboration with all partners. We wanted to know whether the viewers' sense of presence in the virtual scene differs in comparison to watching television, how they react to being involved in a brief virtual conversation, and how they experience the characters Reino and Krista. We were also interested in how viewers perceive the viewing environment and situation at Mediapolis and how the experience could be improved. To find out how fans remembered the experience, we sent them a post-event survey two weeks after the test event.



PICTURE: ULLA BROHOLM, YLE

As predicted, acquiring fans for the test day was easy. A couple of days after the announcement was published on Yle's website, 170 fans had applied to take part in the test. 20 of them were invited to participate and 15 came. During the three-hour test event, the fans were divided into two groups. When the first group was watching the virtual reality scene and filling out the questionnaire, the second group toured the studio set of Uusi Päivä at Mediapolis. To provide the fans with a keepsake from the event and to motivate them to answer the post-event survey, everyone was photographed individually. The photographs were later manipulated to portray the fans with Krista and Reino in the 360° scene. Finally, the images were emailed to the fans together with the post-event survey two weeks after the test event. In addition to the survey, six fans were interviewed individually during the test event.

## RESULTS OF THE TEST EVENT

The test group consisted of 12 women and 3 men. Their age varied from 15 to 49 years, most of the participants being female teenagers. Only one person had earlier experience in using virtual reality glasses. In general, the fans had basic knowledge of 360° videos and virtual reality, however, they had never experienced them before.

Most of the fans had been following UP since the beginning of the series, and were therefore familiar with the main characters of the virtual scene, and they liked them as well. All of the fans shared the experience of being fully or almost fully immersed in the world of Krista and Reino. Many commented on feeling especially immersed into the story after the actors had addressed them. According to the fans, the fact

that they were actually included in the scene was a nice surprise and that it added to the feeling of reality and immersion.

*At first I thought I was there on the sidelines without them knowing of my existence. Later it was revealed that I was included in the scene, which was an amazing addition.*

Most of the fans said that the scene worked well or quite well to be watched with virtual reality glasses. Some commented that the scene could have been longer, while most thought that it was long enough. Others commented on the distance between the viewer and the environment and the actors. Most of them commented on the freedom to look around that the 360° video gave them. What captured the most attention during the viewing was the fact that the experience felt realistic as you could actually see the whole space just by turning your head. Compared to television, the virtual reality glasses enabled more immersion to the scene and according to the fans, it was easier to take in the situation and the environment.

*When I moved my head the image moved with it. It was really great that I could look where I wanted.*

No one thought that the environment around them at Mediapolis distracted the virtual reality experience. Headphones blocked out the noise around them and it was easy to immerse in the scene. When asked about their expectations regarding the usage of the virtual reality glasses, some of the fans commented that they had expected that the quality would have been better. Most of them did not have many expectations as they had never tried VR before and they were satisfied with the experience we provided them with.

*That I would have been sitting alone in a room trying out the glasses. Luckily it was not so and I had the opportunity to try them out with other people but still individually.*

The test group wished that the quality of the video and sound would have been better. They would have also liked there to have been more movement in the scene so that they could have used the whole 360° environment. They also would have wanted more scenes. All in all, the participants were extremely happy with the experience. However, the virtual did not substitute the real. The fans wished they had met real actors during the UP studio tour.

## RESULTS OF THE POST-EVENT SURVEY

The post-event survey was sent to the participants two weeks after the test event. When asked what the fans remembered about the event, most of them mentioned both the virtual reality experience and the audience tour in the UP studio set. They emphasized the feeling of immersion while watching the virtual scene. In regards to the studio tour, they discussed what the UP set had looked like compared to what they had seen on TV.

*I remember that the testing of the virtual reality glasses brought a whole new level to watching the scene, and the tour was really nice since I had never been in Uusi Päiväs set before. It was an amazing experience to be able to visit the studio even though the set seemed a lot smaller than I had thought.*

In the post-event survey answers, a wish for more content (longer scene duration and/or more scenes to be watched with the virtual reality glasses) was brought up. There could have also been more details and movement in the scene to take better advantage of the 360° environment.

*There could have been more things happening around the room, it was hard to look around because the scene focused only on one point.*

All the participants would recommend the experience to others, especially to other Uusi Päivä fans. According to the fans, it was nice to receive a keepsake of the test day. Moreover, having their photographs taken in a green screen studio was regarded as an interesting experience. Some of them had already published the photo in social media.

The biggest wish the fans expressed was that the actors would have been present in the event. They would have liked to talk with the actors and get their autographs.

## SUMMARY OF THE TEST RESULTS

The fans found the virtual experience both interesting and realistic. They felt like they were within the scene, especially when the characters made contact with the fan at the end. Although the experience was new, they felt comfortable being in the same scene with their beloved characters. They also wanted to have more immersive experiences: different scenes including more action and more opportunities for exploration.



Altogether, the fans were very satisfied with the event which consisted of the virtual reality experience, the audience tour and the photo mementos. They also complimented the other arrangements done for the experience even though the duration of the event could have been longer. Even though the participants felt like they were immersed in the world of Uusi Päivä and the characters, the virtual experience did not substitute for meeting the actors. Most of the fans expressed a wish for having the actors present in the test event. Everyone agreed that they would come again in the future, if similar events were to be organized.

## WHAT WAS LEARNED

Finally, the collaborating partners at Mediapolis reviewed the results and discussed how to develop these kinds of events in the future. Even though the interest of the fans of UP was known beforehand, it was surprising how real and amazing the experience of the virtual reality testing was for the participants. The results indicate that VR technologies offer promising opportunities for the creation of more immersive and attractive viewer experiences

than what is possible through traditional television. The results also show that the whole testing event with its different phases – the virtual reality experience, the tour in the UP studio set and taking the 360° photograph in the virtual studio – formed a package that can be offered for people visiting Mediapolis in the future.

The simple 360° video scene served well for the purpose of the experiment. With the video, it was possible to test how fans experience immersive content in general. In addition, we received a lot of valuable feedback to be utilized when developing immersive videos in the future. The organizers agreed with the fans on the fact that there could have been more elements and movement in the virtual reality scene. More details, such as props and soundscapes, are needed in the scene as the viewers also want to explore the environment in the virtual reality world. In an ideal situation, the 360° video should be shot by using the same process as in the television production and its rehearsals. On the other hand, the production was originally planned to be light and easy, and it would have not made sense to pursue perfect



PICTURE: ULLA BROHOLM, YLE

quality. Considering the resources available, the video quality as well as the feedback was good.

The testing event also showed a huge interest among the fans towards the process of creating television shows. In this sense, having the fans' photos taken in the virtual studio was a good addition to the event. The organizers of the event also estimated that a 360° video featuring the production process of Uusi Päivä would really interest the fans. Considering this, it is highly likely that “backstage videos” would interest other visitors as well as the fans. Overall, it was noted that a virtual experience can be a good addition to audience tours at Mediapolis. It does not substitute for meeting the actors in real life, but it can offer experiences that would not be possible otherwise, such as the immersion to the story or following the production of the show. The questionnaires carried out during the experiment were also successful. The fans that participated in the

testing answered the open ended questions carefully. The fans proved to be an excellent target group for whom and with whom more virtual experiences should be created and tested.

Uusi Päivä, UP, is one of the most watched programs on Yle TV2, and on the Finnish scale, the program has a large and committed audience. More than 200,000 viewers watch the series daily, and there are more than 90,000 followers on Instagram and over 70,000 followers on Facebook. The production will, however, end in 2018.

