The VR baton is about to be passed from marketer to consumer

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The day Oculus launched its Kickstarter campaign, 1 August 2012, is ground zero from modern virtual reality (VR), writes **Karl Woolley**, creative technologist at Framestore.

Fast-forward to 2016 and the show floor at CES was saturated with VR headsets and tertiary businesses hoping to support and enhance the VR world.

Though radically more affordable and sophisticated than before, VR tech has until now only been available to developers and obsessives. You couldn't walk into a high street store and buy a VR headset like you can a TV. But this is about to change.

Radio didn't start with ads, TV didn't start with ads - with VR's evolution we have flipped the usual protocol on its head and this reversal has so far shaped the type of content that's available

Over the next six months, a multitude of VR headsets will become available to the public.

Big players like Sony, HTC/Vale and Oculus all release consumer VR tech shortly. With investment in the billions, it is fare to say that big business sees a future in this new form of media.

No longer the domain of professional geeks, anyone who wants to buy a VR headset will soon be able to. So the acid test for mass VR adoption is very close. And the result will prove whether or not VR is just another **marketing** fad.

All of this is well and good. "Build it and they will come", right? Well, not necessarily. Like any form of media, for it to be engaging – and therefore successful – people have to *want* to experience it.

In this 'beta' phase leading up to the commercial release of consumer VR, most people's experiences have come purely from **marketing** campaigns. Some of those experiences have been good; some, not so good.

Radio didn't start with ads. TV didn't start with ads. Nor any other form of popular entertainment. With VR's evolution, however, we have flipped the usual protocol on its head and this reversal has so far shaped the type of content that's available.

But for VR to be truly successful, it needs great content… something that doesn't have an overtly commercial agenda. And that means looking beyond VR **marketing** campaigns.

Thousands of developers, from both small teams and big studios, have been creating content to give consumers an experience that only VR can deliver.

VR big boys like Sony and Oculus are launching with around 100 titles each, which is phenomenal. Meanwhile, Hollywood studios are partnering with specialists to bring their much-loved IPs to VR platforms, allowing fans to step inside these hallowed film worlds and engage with their surroundings.

With consumer VR tech ranging from almost $0 for Google Cardboard to $100 for Samsung Gear VR and around $600 for Sony, Vive and Oculus; it's clear the physical technology is now here at a (mostly) affordable price. But good tech is nothing without good content.

Ready-made delivery platforms mean good content

Fortunately, a lot of under-the-radar work has gone into VR content development since 2012.

Sony's PlayStation has a readymade user-base of 36m and a known platform for delivering games and other content.

Vive, running on Steam, has a *huge* platform and pre-existing ecosystem to deliver the same.

Oculus, although the darling of VR, has had more work to do, almost starting from scratch. But thanks to Facebook's dollars, Oculus now also has a delivery platform and infrastructure.

Meanwhile, YouTube and Facebook have been delivering 360-degree video experiences in both VR and desktop.

This has been a good measure of consumer appetite for VR. When I started working in VR three years ago, nobody knew what I was taking about. Now everyone from geeky friends to family members are sharing and engaging with all manner of 360-degree videos.

The tech is now affordable, the platforms are in place and the content is nearly out there. In short, all the necessary ingredients are finally coming together. So it's now time to hand the reigns to consumers. Their enthusiasm will determine VR's future success or failure.

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