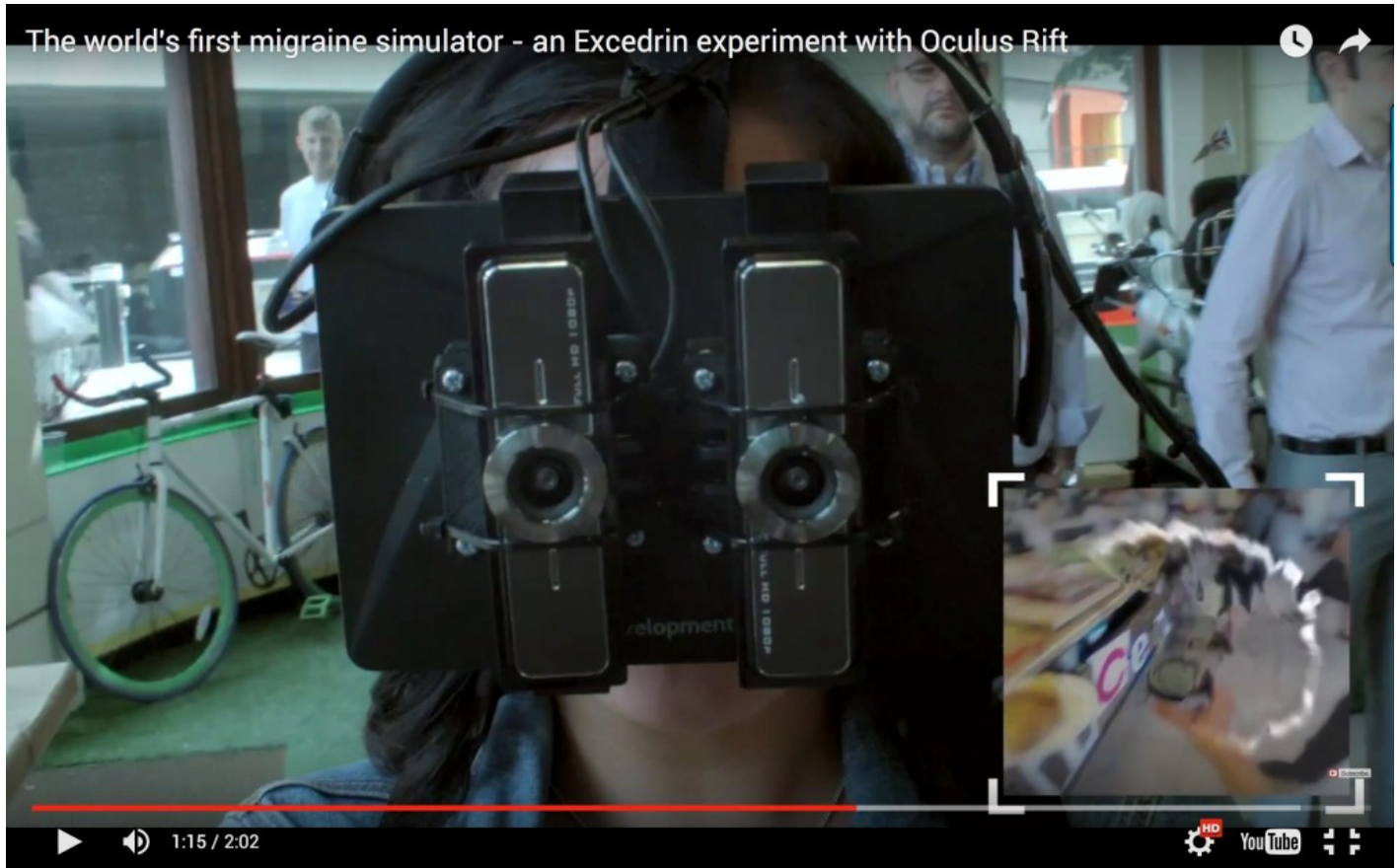


Will 2016 be a Big Year for Virtual Reality in Pharma?

Categories : [Digital Marketing](#), [Integrated Marketing](#), [Pharma](#), [Tech Lifestyle](#), [User Experience](#)

Tagged as : [virtual-reality](#)

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One of the more amazing technological innovations of 2015 was the consumerization of virtual reality. Google Cardboard, which started out almost as a joke, came into its own this November when the New York Times distributed over 1 million Cardboard units to their subscribers, featuring a film, "The Displaced," which follows the lives of three refugee children. Also in November, the consumer launch of the Samsung Gear VR created a sensation – bringing to market an inexpensive and already refined product that uses an ordinary smartphone to drive an immersive VR experience. The Gear sprang into being with a rich content library and a very polished user experience. If you own the right flagship Samsung phone the Gear was likely on your holiday shopping list.

Virtual reality offers many possibilities for pharma. In the short-term, the sheer novelty of the

technology guarantees a certain share of attention. This is likely only a 12 month opportunity. Next year many virtual reality units are scheduled to be rolled out, so it is probable that there will be a flood of pharma efforts by mid-year.

If you've had a chance to try it out, virtual reality offers a riveting experience and intense moments of simulation. What better technology could there be to teach HCPs to relate emotionally to the suffering of patients of various disease states?



Last Summer [Excedrin created a stunt with Oculus Rift](#), the most sophisticated but expensive and unwieldy VR apparatus out there, and simulated the effects of a migraine. Excedrin clearly reached way out of their box in terms of their indication, but they got their point across and plenty of attention.

Recently, in Australia, [there was an effort to convey the experience of Multiple Sclerosis using a bicycle](#) – built to malfunction. "Its gears are unpredictable, its frame off-balanced, and its brakes numb to press," the ad's narrator continues. "This bike has multiple sclerosis." You can imagine doing something similar with VR. Many disease states where symptoms are visual, auditory, or balance related can be simulated with VR – migraine being a leading example.

The high-tech geewiz effect of VR offers a tremendous method to visualize the structure and chemistry of some of the high-science drug compounds now launching. It delivers a [Fantastic-Voyage-type](#) experience of zooming through chemical structures and pathways in order to understand the science behind the therapies. VR serves up great gaming possibilities for learning – which could be an interactive competition at a conference or online. And the fact that the Samsung Gear VR is only \$100 makes it well within possibility to equip sales forces with the unit to deliver unique and interesting experiences to doctors.

The two options above offer standalone experiences built specifically for VR. It's always takes a big push to get someone to download an individual app or sign up for one of your experiences. Maybe that's too much to ask. Another option is to piggyback on other developed VR content – whether it's a movie, story, or game – and interject a brand message of some sort, almost like an advertisement, to put it crudely. Ideally this would be content complementing the subject matter so branded content wouldn't seem out of place and would offer value to the viewer.

Next year, Oculus will launch its full-scale Rift headset in the first quarter of 2016, while HTC is expected to begin selling its much-anticipated Vive not much later. Sony is also said to be readying to launch its PlayStation VR headset in the first half of next year. 2016 will be a big year for virtual reality in general and VR could be an area where pharma can actually be in the forefront of innovation rather than its typical laggard position. Let's hope so.