

At a virtual reality expo, VR comes in many forms

August 30 2015, byDerrick J. Lang



In this Jan. 6, 2015 file photo, Yasmin Moorman looks into the Galaxy Gear VR headset at the Samsung booth during the International CES, in Las Vegas. While more than 1,500 attendees are expected on Saturday, Aug. 29, 2015, at the VRLA expo, the event probably won't feel very crowded. That's because headset-wearing convention goers will be transported to other worlds during the second-annual celebration of virtual reality at the Los Angeles Convention Center. (AP Photo/John Locher, File)

A few inches above the floor, a man is suspended from a swing-like apparatus pretending he's flying over a mountain. Around the corner, a woman is defending herself against a horde of zombies with a make-believe gun. Several feet away, two guys are seemingly racing in cars over 100 mph while both sit still.

They're each, in their own way, experiencing [virtual reality](#).

At the third annual VRLA, a gathering of VR creators and enthusiasts in Southern California, the immersive technology transported more than 2,000 attendees beyond the walls of the Los Angeles Convention Center to other countries, worlds and dimensions.

A few lines to try some of the VR experiences at the one-day event required wait times of over an hour inside the laser-and-smoke-filled concourse hall.

"It really feels like the momentum has shifted," VRLA co-founder Cosmo Scharf told the sold-out crowd at the beginning of the day. "More people care about VR today than ever before."

Scharf said there are currently 733 VR companies in the U.S. and VR startups have raised more than \$800 million in funding since 2010.

While VR on smartphones is now available with headsets like Google Cardboard, Samsung Gear VR and Noon VR, regular folks interested in higher fidelity and more interactive experiences must experiment with them in person at events such as VRLA— that is, until higher-powered systems are released to consumers over the course of the next year.

Sony and Oculus VR, which is owned by Facebook, plan to launch retail editions of their VR headsets in early 2016, while Valve and HTC are expected to release their Vive system later this year.



In this June 11, 2015 file photo, Oculus founder Palmer Luckey holds up the new Oculus Rift virtual reality headset for photographers following a news conference, in San Francisco. While more than 1,500 attendees are expected on Saturday, Aug. 29, 2015, at the VRLA expo, the event probably won't feel very crowded. That's because headset-wearing convention goers will be transported to other worlds during the second-annual celebration of virtual reality at the Los Angeles Convention Center. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

"I really wanted to see what all the companies are coming up with," said Seyed Mousavi, a University of Southern California student who attended VRLA. "I heard the HTC Vive is amazing. I haven't had a chance to try it."

The irony of gathering potential consumers in the real world to experience virtual ones isn't lost on those in the VR business.

"The biggest marketing challenge facing the whole virtual reality industry is that you can't experience VR until you experience VR," said Ivan Blaustein, director of product integration at VRcade. "That's why an event like this is important for us."

VRcade, a wireless multiplayer VR system not intended for home use, was the most popular exhibitor at Saturday's event. VRLA attendees tried out the system in a 30-by-30 foot space. The company is currently testing VRcade at a Dave and Buster's location in Milpitas, Calif.

"I think there's room for all types of VR," said Blaustein. "There are compelling experiences you can have at home, but there's always going to be limitations. With our system, there's a dedicated space and no wire. You won't have to move your couch or kick your cat out of the way."

More information: www.virtualrealityla.com

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Citation: At a virtual reality expo, VR comes in many forms (2015, August 30) retrieved 27 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-virtual-reality-expo-vr.html>

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