

Web pioneer Halsey Minor bets on VR with Live Planet

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Halsey Minor is no stranger to being at the bleeding edge of a new industry.

Over his more than two-decade career as a tech entrepreneur and businessman, Minor has been involved with numerous pioneering startups. CNET, which he co-founded, was one of the first web publishing companies. Salesforce.com, in which he was an early investor, was one of the first cloud services companies. And Rhapsody, in which he also was an early investor, was one of the first subscription music services.

After some real estate investments went bad, he filed for bankruptcy in the wake of the Great Recession. But now he's returned to tech and is focusing on yet another nascent business - virtual reality. Live Planet, his new company, has developed a camera system designed to record stereoscopic three-dimensional VR experiences. And it's working on a cloud-based service that would allow people creating VR videos to easily edit, produce and distribute them. The service would also help video creators tackle some of the thornier problems in VR, such as how to direct people viewing a 360-degree video to a particular focal point, like a stage or a basketball court.

Minor recently spoke with the San Jose Mercury News about Live Planet and the future of [virtual reality](#). This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Who are the customers or industries you're targeting?

A: At our price point, it could be anyone from restaurants, security or people in the media - or people who just want to have a VR camera in their house for the family. I mean, at the price point that we're at, the market is going to actually tell us more than we can tell the market.

In the entertainment industry, it's clear that reality TV is going to be one of the first big markets. We're working with just about every reality TV producer, who are looking at it as sort of an adjunct to their programming.

I think the first VR stream that's going to get a million viewers a week is going to be reality TV programming. It's easy to find places to put the cameras. It's easy to get the deals done. It's content people already want. And conceptually, it's just reality TV, only with more reality.

I think sports is going to be big, but nobody knows where to put the cameras yet. Nobody's going to take floor seats away from two people right now until they know what the economics are. It's going to take a little longer. The leagues are going to have to get involved, and the TV networks have to sign off.

And then music is going to be an early one. Everything from artists creating experiences while they're recording their music to concerts, and instead of selling 50,000 tickets, they can sell 150,000 tickets. And you can create things you can't even do at the concert - go backstage, next to the lead singer, out in the crowd.

Q: What problem is Live Planet trying to solve?

A: What we're trying to do is just to make it so that creatives can spend all their money being creative and not have to waste their money trying

to figure out how to reach all these different VR platforms. And we're trying to create a whole set of next-generation services for next-generation creative visionaries.

It's things like, in our cloud service, creating triggers if somebody shows up in a room. We have partners in reality TV programming. They want the camera to turn on when somebody is actually present.

We're building intelligence into the cloud so that creatives can say simple things like, when you connect to the VR stream, where should you look. Well, it's a live event, you should look where most people are looking.

Q: When it comes to VR adoption, we're in really early days. How dependent is the success of your business on people getting VR headsets?

A: I see us as actually driving the adoption of VR, because the business is going to be driven by the quality of the content. If the content's not good, nobody's going to buy the headsets.

By taking so much cost and complexity out of content creation, now you can let a thousand flowers bloom, and some of them are going to drive people to want to go out and want to experience VR.

Q: Your idea that video is going to drive VR is opposite of what Facebook is betting on with Oculus, which is much more focused on games.

A: It is. But I just don't think you'll see people spend \$20 million to build a game that's been designed for VR from the ground up until people know what works and what doesn't work.

To take any reality TV show and to add this to it is very inexpensive now. And you get content that's in demand. If you take the Kardashians, people are already following them on Twitter. They're already following on Instagram. They're already following on Snapchat. This is the next generation, in VR, of social media. Now you're having dinner with the Kardashians.

The economics of doing VR video with our technology is inexpensive. So you're just going to have so much more creative content around VR video than you're going to have around games.

Q: Does it worry you to be this early to the industry?

A: I don't think it's that early. You have to kind of put this in context. When I started CNET, I was trying to sell banner ads for 28.8-kilobit modems. And that was really hard.

Today, I can send video over a 4G network to this phone right here and make people go giddy. I've never seen an industry start as good as this industry is. I think that really the only thing that's missing is content.

Halsey Minor

Age: 51

Birthplace: Charlottesville, Va.

Position: CEO and founder, Live Planet; founder and chairman, Uphold

Previous jobs: Co-founder, CEO, CNET; founder, Snap, which became NBCi; early investor, Grand Central, which became Google Voice; early

investor, former board member, Salesforce.com; founder, Vignette

Education: Bachelor of arts in anthropology, University of Virginia

Family: Married with seven children, ages 3 to 19

Residence: Los Angeles

Other interests: Spending time with his family. "I have seven kids, so my life as a parent trumps my doing anything else."

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Five things about Halsey Minor

1. Never met his father.
2. Built a kind of intranet for Merrill Lynch in 1990 using Asymetrix ToolBook, a Windows program developed by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen that was similar to HyperCard, which Apple developed for the Mac.
3. Met his wife in the middle of Los Angeles' La Cienega Boulevard.
4. Built CNET from scratch into a Nasdaq 100 company.
5. Owned a pony named Target with a perfect ring around his rear end.

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