

How Hotelschool The Hague uses VR to improve hospitality education

Hotelschool The Hague was founded and funded in 1929 by the hospitality industry to create a hub where students can develop, conduct research and share their hospitality knowledge and skills in a realistic setting and hone their leadership talent for a successful career in the industry. Since then, it has become one of the top 10 hospitality management schools worldwide.

The school has several programmes on offer, including a four-year bachelor of arts in hospitality management, a fast-track bachelor programme, and masters in international hospitality management and hotel transformation.



Challenge

Higher education faces many financial, political, social, and technological challenges, and increasing competition. To attract and engage students, the education sector has a long history of adopting emerging technologies to supplement traditional pedagogical methods.

Virtual reality helps to transform education by delivering meaningful teaching and learning experiences that enhance engagement and retention, and promote inclusivity. VR lets students learn through experience, by going beyond textbooks and lectures, helping them to become active participants in their own education. By providing learners with engaging, memorable and impactful experiences, it helps them learn more effectively, build important skills such as empathy and collaboration, and retain what they learned long after they leave the classroom.

As an educational technology, VR using 360° video is great for placing learners in a different environment outside of the classroom allowing learners to experience a context and visualize concepts and situations in an immersive way. Perhaps most importantly, 360° video allows the learner to experience a situation or environment in the first person, allowing for delivery of emotion and encouraging agency as well as personal, real and active learning.

This medium is ideal for transferring emotion and allowing a learner to feel the emotion in a scenario as well as develop empathy by taking the perspective of someone different to themselves. 360° video allows for the learner to be placed in a new simulated environment that may be inaccessible, unsafe or expensive to experience in real-life, allowing for contextual learning and visualization of concepts and context.

As a result it is a natural fit for safety training as well as soft skills training such as leadership and guest relations to experience difficult situations and build emotional intelligence through exposure. 360° video can also be used effectively for developing customer experience prototypes of new environments as well as visualizing standard operating procedures. Furthermore, 360° video can be used to create immersive case studies that position the learner within a first-person perspective and present them with a problem to be resolved.

In hospitality, VR can enhance event planning, training, customer experience prototyping and marketing. When using 360° video, VR can recreate induction experiences enabling familiarity with the work environment, allowing new employees to practice standard operating procedures prior to their first day. For educators and creators of educational content, 360° video is relatively easy to learn and a nice entry point into VR and immersive technology.

Solution

Hotelschool The Hague works together with other international hospitality universities to prepare students and professionals for a changing profession through immersive real-life learning experiences.

In one of the first projects, as a result of the pandemic, the Future of Work minor experimented with the use of a 360° VR training scenario on dealing with difficult conversations. By making decisions to deal with a challenging team member, one can build leadership skills through trial and error in a safe virtual environment and gain leadership experience in a VR world. This can inform future situations one may find oneself in as a leader within the future of work.

To get up and running quickly, they sourced the scenario from an external content provider and provided Google Cardboard fold-out viewers to students to play it on their own mobile phones. Learners described the experience as being stimulating and impactful, with many feeling like they were actually present in the room.

In a subsequent project, students could create their own scenarios around unconscious bias and diversity and inclusion. In a course on change management, learners get to experience resistance to change in the first person. Within the context of a fictional coffee company, learners are placed in the role of a change consultant who is meeting with a difficult branch manager. The company aims to enhance customer experience through training for frontline staff, which conflicts with the manager's profit motive resulting in continuous resistance. Learners face the challenge of taking decisions to influence the branch manager to get onboard with the change.

The school selected Warp VR to create and distribute realistic, 360° video based experiences that support story branching and easy to play on both VR headsets and smartphones. After the experience, the process of reflection through experiential learning was facilitated to make the link to change management theory, while building competencies in soft skills such as decision making, critical thinking and perspective taking.



Dealing with a difficult customer in a restaurant



Beekeeping awareness training

A related project feeding into the VR/AR Project is the Transforming Hospitality Education through Tech Abilities (THETA) Erasmus+ research project. For this project, Hotelschool The Hague is working together with four partner institutions. The THETA project aspires to enable real-life learning through immersive technologies on mobile phones to enhance hospitality education. Furthermore, the project intends to develop guidelines for educators and learners on how to create their own low-tech AR and VR experiences which are easy to use to enrich teaching and learning.

The THETA project is developing four prototypes using immersive technologies, which are refined using student feedback. One of these is Branched Storytelling, which uses 360° video for soft-skills training giving students the chance to experience the emotion of a difficult conversation with a guest while testing decision-making and critical-thinking skills. Another prototype, The Outlets, allows students to feel present in hospitality outlets such as the kitchen and front desk without having to be there physically while providing an introduction to equipment and processes.

Results

Hotelschool The Hague has introduced immersive technologies into eight courses of its curriculum thus far. After the delivery of an immersive experience in the classroom, the didactical process shifts to structured reflection through an experiential learning model to relate and apply classroom theory to solve the problem faced in the VR/AR scenario. The experience is turned into a learning moment through critical in-class reflection and group coaching approaches.

The school uses 10 PICO headsets that can be screencasted to digiboards for live group reflection. Further adoption by other departments within the school is stimulated with informal workshops, dissemination presentations, collaboration with industry partners on the development of immersive learning experiences and the development of manuals to promote both student and educator created content.

Initial research results indicated that students preferred highly interactive experiences with gamification elements. In addition, for AR experiences, rather than viewing 2D video on cutting techniques within an immersive platform, students wanted to be able to view 3D objects (eg. the knife) from different angles in order to maximize the benefits of the medium. Furthermore, the 360° video on dealing with a difficult guest was perceived as being highly engaging.

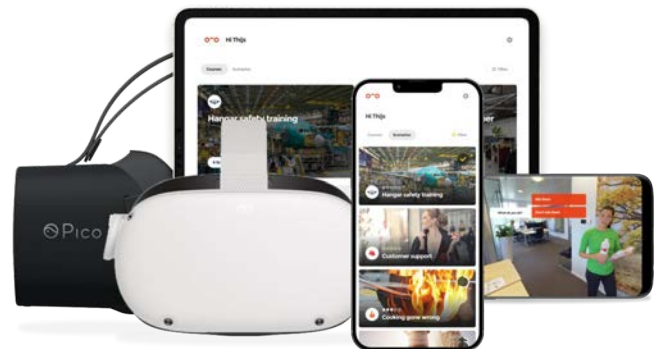


"It has been an absolute pleasure working with the Warp VR team over the past two years who are always willing to help and provided support when needed. The platform is easy to use, looks professional, is reliable and works well even when distributing to large classes (over 120 students)."

Che Govender, Lecturer VR/AR in Education, Hotelschool The Hague

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