

VFX to Teach Religion?? Learning from Immersive Media

Doug Stewart
VFX Supervisor
LDS Motion Picture Studio
Provo, Utah
dog@dogstew.com

Tucker Dansie
Post Production Manager
LDS Motion Picture Studio
Provo, Utah
DansieTT@ldschurch.org

ABSTRACT

As Generation X shifts to Millennials, there is a growing need to adjust the way that we teach. Utilizing modern technology, we continue to explore various types of Immersive Media to teach religion. Our in-house Visual Effects (VFX) Team has become the perfect puzzle piece that pushes the limits with our new teaching methods.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **User centered design**; **Activity centered design**; *Mobile computing*; *Social media*;

KEYWORDS

VFX, Visual Effects, Virtual Reality, Mobile App, Immersive Media, Religion, Visual Learning, Teaching, Production

ACM Reference Format:

Doug Stewart and Tucker Dansie. 2018. VFX to Teach Religion?? Learning from Immersive Media. In *Proceedings of SIGGRAPH '18 Educator's Forum*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3215641.3215644>

1 OUR AUDIENCE IS CHANGING

“When nothing is occupying my attention, the first thing I do is reach for my phone.” Millennials learn in a different way. We now have 8 seconds to catch someone’s attention (that’s less than a goldfish’s attention span).[McSpadden 2015]

We needed to utilize the technology that follows our everyday lives to help reach others, even when the topic is religion. Our focus led to understanding the media that our audience is consuming and embracing it.

2 THE IMMERSIVE MEDIA DECISION

We concluded that immersive media is the future of teaching—including virtual and augmented reality, wider view cinematography, 1st-person mobile apps, new cinema theatre designs with wrap around projections, social media integration, and general mobile media. We didn’t want to shy away from immersive media, though it does inherently have certain complexities and costs associated with it. Some of the more interesting areas of immersive media (IM) are still in their infancy as far as development and ways to

distribute them. For a church that distributes an enormous amount of media every year, truly utilizing IM has been challenging.

Though we may typically be portrayed as a fairly conservative church, our track record of utilizing various type of publicly distributed media has been all but conservative. We have even built an immersive Cinema Theatre that surrounds the audience with a wide panorama screen utilizing multiple projectors with blended seams. The viewing experience is similar to wearing your own set of VR goggles without the goggles.



Figure 1: The LDS Church History Museum Vision Theater.

3 QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Does IM truly help others better understand the root messages we are trying to share? This has been our biggest question that continually surfaces. We ask this question on every level of the organization. This is the question we try and answer when we send prototypes into testing groups. And, yes, we do testing groups.

Our challenges circle around the infancy of IM. Are there proven methods of distribution? Do we need to develop our own distribution streams? Ideally, we have a YouTube-like platform for all our diverse media options. But, as we come up with new ideas, we hit hurdles with distribution. Then, we see exponential cost increases. Just like any other organization, we try and operate wisely and treat the funds to do various projects as fragile gifts.

4 VIRTUAL NEW TESTAMENT

From what started as a Life of Christ visitor’s center exhibit, our Jerusalem virtual set has been 8 years in the making and we’re still making improvements. Having an in-house VFX team has allowed for a very big library of digital assets to be created and re-purposed. It’s like an unlimited space for props.

Once various sponsoring teams decided to help fund a mobile app, it made perfect sense to utilize our 3D Jerusalem asset. We then went through more rounds of adjustments addressing the notes

Permission to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for third-party components of this work must be honored. For all other uses, contact the Owner/Author.

SIGGRAPH '18 Educator's Forum, August 12-16, 2018, Vancouver, BC, Canada

© 2018 Copyright held by the owner/author(s).

ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-5884-2/18/08.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3215641.3215644>

from well accredited scholars. This collaboration has been crucial to help make the Virtual New Testament App a strong teaching tool in universities and for anyone wanting to understand the layout of old Jerusalem. It combines a combination of pre-animated camera moves, 360 degree points of interest, and fantastic user experience of walking around the grounds near the temple and even into the temple. The interactive touch points provide information specific to various locations.

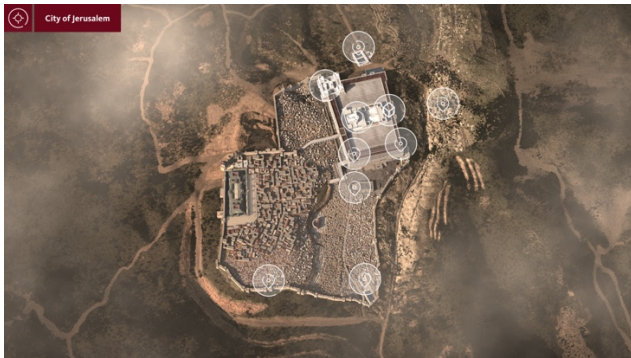


Figure 2: The Virtual New Testament App highlights various user interactive touch points.

5 SCRIPTURES VISUAL READER PROTOTYPE

Our VFX team was tasked with a method of teaching young kids and low-literacy demographics. Through the ideation process, we brainstormed many potential areas of emphasis. We decided the most important aspect we could focus on was the scriptures—one of the foundations of our religion. We already had scripture apps and statistics on how many people are using those apps, when they use them, and what parts they use the most.

We moved forward with flow charts. We decided to help complement the written scriptures with visuals. We didn't want just any visuals. We wanted the visuals to also resonate with young kids and youth. We had just finished filming the first year of a long project where we took stories from the scriptures and filmed their narrative. We also took the opportunity to capture various 360 video clips and 3D capture of characters and sets. We didn't know, then, what we wanted to use that footage and data for. So, when the flow chart for the scriptures visual reader progressed, we had several options of media to choose from.

We ran into the same challenges and questions regarding how applicable certain immersive media could be for this type of application. Where do we move forward from here? We've had limited test groups with less than consistent results. Should this type of media be integrated into something like the scriptures?

6 AUDIENCE RESPONSE AND PROGRESS

We often hear, "those Mormons really know how to get their stuff out there." Mormon media is everywhere. We recently had a committee of other faiths come to us to partner with them, to help team up with them to distribute general faith promoting messages—the FaithCounts.com website, for example.

We've made new media and social media work for us. We're everywhere and we don't get offended when people make fun of us. When the Book of Mormon musical hit Broadway, the Mormon Church paid for specific sponsored ads to place in the playbill and ads to be displayed on various digital billboards in Times Square.

We plan on moving forward with improving and refining the way people experience the scriptures. Our goal is that anyone and everyone can benefit from these visualizations. Religion shouldn't be perceived as boring—especially in regards to teaching, reading, and understanding the scriptures.

As we move forward, we continually try to find the balance of how to best utilize the various media options available. Do these media options help others understand the root messages that we are trying to teach? This constant question will help push us in the right direction.

Our Visual Effects and Immersive Media goals are expanding into other areas and utilizing artists and technicians not of our faith. We look forward to future joint ventures and projects that will reach all the demographics that will benefit from new ways of teaching.

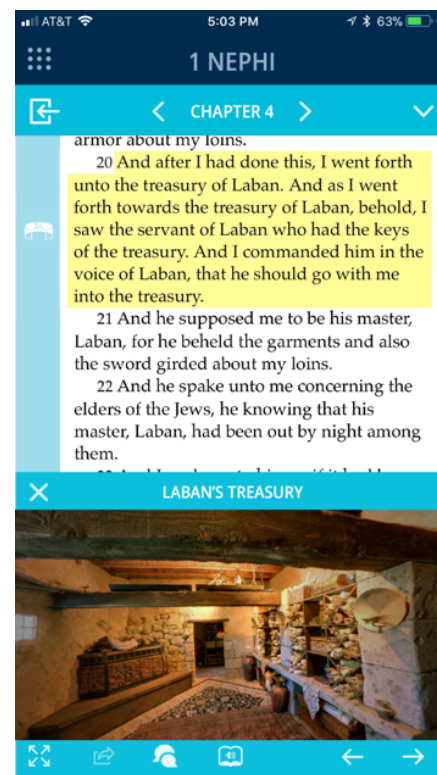


Figure 3: The Scriptures Visual Reader Prototype app highlights a 360 interactive image of a set-dressed room displayed as a pop-up window.

REFERENCES

Kevin McSpadden. 2015. You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish. Retrieved May 10, 2018 from <http://time.com/3858309/attention-spans-goldfish/>