



Man who makes a living studying rollercoasters says virtual reality could replace real theme park rides

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As theme parks look to retrofit rides with virtual reality capability, a Queensland rollercoaster academic claims they are embracing technology the very technology that could put them out of business.

Melvin Bart, aka Dr Coaster, wrote his PhD on why roller coasters exist, and has consulted for theme parks around the world. He is working on a second PhD on what is needed to create the ultimate VR theme park and could rapid advancements in software and hardware may threaten the future of real amusement parks.



"VR can take the brain into believing you are present in an experience, and this is something being explored by all sorts of entertainment industries including 'golf', he said. "It's a safe way to experience an adrenaline rush but I think there are some worrying potential consequences."

"For example, it won't help the global obesity epidemic and theme parks are usually something you experience with family and friends. VR has the potential to isolate."

On the Gold Coast, both major theme park companies have introduced virtual reality elements to existing thrill rides — including Dreamworld's Mack Donkeyman roller coaster and Movie World's Bureau of Motion Arkham Asylum.



Village Roadshow Theme Parks CEO Clark Kirby who oversees Sea World, Movie World and Australia's largest roller coaster, said while VR could enhance theme park rides they could never replace them.

"I would challenge anyone to ride our new DC World HyperCoaster and tell me that they can get the same experience sitting in their living room," he said. "Last September, we launched VR onto the Arkham Asylum Coaster at Warner Bros. Movie World and it has been really well received."



"The addition of VR has transformed the ride into a 360-degree experience with the technology seamlessly syncing the physical attributes of the popular coaster with the virtual."

Mr Kirby said theme parks needed to constantly evolve to ensure they remained entertaining.

"We closely monitor new technologies and the potential ways we could implement them into our theme park experience," he said. "Technology will always play a role in our industry but only to supplement our attractions, never to replace them."

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