



# The Future is Here

By Jessica Hawthorne-Castro

**H**ow many common items do you own that didn't even exist just 10 years ago? The list is probably longer than you think.

Prior to the iPhone's first release in 2007, most of us didn't have the handheld personal computers more commonly known as smartphones. We didn't have mobile apps, decent phone cameras for capturing photos and videos, or mobile shopping. Can you imagine life without Uber, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and YouTube?

Also not yet in existence were Airbnb, Tinder, Fitbit, Spotify, Dropbox, Hulu, BuzzFeed, and *Jet.com*, all of which have become popular over the last few years. And 10 years ago, few people were talking about crowdfunding, the sharing economy, social media marketing, cloud storage, data mining, mobile gaming, gesture controls, chatbots, data analytics, virtual reality, 3-D printers, or drone deliveries.

If we leapfrog to 2020 and the decade that follows, we should acknowledge that our lives will again change radically. Here's a glimpse of a stunningly different future that will likely come into view.



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## More Branded, More Personalized

Personalized experiences are no longer a "nice to have," and they will expand into all consumer touchpoints. In a recent report from *Forbes*, "How Marketers Are Driving Growth Through Personalized Content," the author talks about how delivering personalized

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experiences to customers has become a top priority for marketers.

There was a time when advertising was advertising, and content was content. As the lines between the two began to blur, the concept of “branded content” has become an important strategy for creating messaging that combines content with advertising. Defined as “a form of advertising that uses generating of content as a way to promote the particular brand that funds the content’s production,” branded content is typically funded by the brand or corporation (rather than by a studio or content producer).

Branded content may focus on a single brand or appear on a platform that features multiple brands, according to a recent article in *Adweek* by Theodor Arhio and Juha-Matti Raunio of TBWA Helsinki. “We think the definition of branded entertainment should be the following: It’s content, it’s likeable, it’s creative, it meets brands’ objectives, and it’s good enough to get a primetime slot on a major commercial channel,” the authors say. “Expect to see more marketers integrating branded content into their overall advertising strategies through the rest of 2016 and into 2017 (and beyond).”

### **Virtual Reality Becomes Reality**

Forget about cross-screen interactions. Soon we’ll be viewing content in wholly-immersive virtual reality (VR) or holographic images. The time when every American owns and uses his or her VR headset is several years off, but the fact that Olympic triathletes such as Gwen Jorgensen used one as she trained to tackle the bike course in Rio de Janeiro is a sign of things to come.

Futurist Thomas Frey says that the world of virtual and augmented reality (AR) is set to explode around us as headsets become more affordable for consumers. Frey points to theme-park rides that could combine physical rides with VR experiences, live sports broadcasts in VR, full-length VR movies, and physical and psychological therapy through VR as a few examples of how the technology may manifest itself by 2020.

While it’s still a little far-out in terms of actual entertainment value and consumer consumption, there are places in which virtual reality is having a true impact. In medicine, for example, individuals who can’t walk can already use the devices for rehabilitation without having to leave their hospital beds. The same concept will be applied in the consumer world, where VR-enabled smartphones allow people to share immersive experiences (e.g., your best friend’s wedding) that they can’t attend in person. These are real breakthroughs that over the next few years will surely make their way into the advertising realm.

### **Sharing What’s Sharable**

Just 10 years ago, it would have been unthinkable to rent a portion of your home out to a total stranger, or jump into a car driven by someone you didn’t know—or that wasn’t operated by an “official” cab driver. Fast-forward to 2016, and both things are completely acceptable thanks to advancements in the “sharing” economy. And growth in what’s sharable is driving change in the advertising world, which is being pushed to develop supporting platforms, sharable content, mobile apps, and other tools that support the new consumer mindset.

Other trends to watch in this area include the development of “crash-proof” cars, driverless cars, in-car entertainment for those autonomous vehicles, electric car charging stations that take five minutes (or less) to “fill’er up,” and high-speed tube transportation. Our entire financial system could also change with the use of Bitcoin loans.

Also expect to see more products connected to the Internet of Things (IoT)—the network of physical devices, vehicles, and buildings embedded with electronics, software, sensors, and actuators designed to communicate with users and other devices. Frey says IoT devices will include smart chairs that self-adjust to minimize pressure points and optimize user comfort, sensor-laced articles of clothing, and smart dishes that keep track of food consumption. The applications for IoT are virtually limitless and will expand over the next three years and beyond.

### **The Future Develops Faster**

Did you know that the universe is expanding at an increasing rate? Here on Earth, events are also taking place faster than they used to. Snapchat enables fast, fleeting photo-sharing among users. Add VR to the mix, and more advertisers will be producing hologram-based visuals to support branded content and/or brand messaging, as Kit Kat did last year to target students in Japan with special-edition packaging that enabled a 3-D video of the boy band DISH//.

To keep up with innovations like these, advertisers are going to have to embrace a “speedier” world and come up with new ways to engage consumers on their own terms. It won’t be easy, but we look forward to the challenge of developing cutting-edge, analytics-based models that can succeed in any market and under any conditions. The coming years offer DR marketers vast areas of opportunity, and I look forward to joining you on the journey ahead. ☒