

BrandLab uses VR to recreate the eternal cycle of fashion

Fashiontech expert BrandLab creates unique VR showrooms for fashion buyers. They saw their profits skyrocket by 500% between May and June during COVID-19.

Set to open new offices in LA, Paris and New York, BrandLab intends to expand its activity beyond the fashion industry using D2C platforms from shopping centres and art galleries to car showrooms and football club stores.

Created in 2016 by Welsh entrepreneurs Dan O’Connell and Jennifer Drury, this fashiontech startup was already successful before the pandemic. At the time, it had already developed digital showrooms for over 200 brands around the world including the UK, Italy, South Africa, Dubai and the US.

A victim of its own success during COVID having received so many new customer enquiries, BrandLab had to develop customised virtual showrooms to recreate the experience of a brand’s physical space from the floorboards, the shape of the chairs through to the bespoke hangers.

How does it work? Buyers can browse through 360-degree showrooms, view individual garments including close-ups of fabric textures with clickable links to product and price information. They can also watch catwalk shows filmed exclusively on BrandLab’s 50-foot catwalk and add products directly to their baskets.

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“We were seeing fantastic growth at the start of 2020, mainly with brands seeking to improve their sustainability credentials and reduce huge costs in wholesale buying. When COVID hit, all of a sudden we were the number one solution. For brands, the ability to maintain customer relationships in a world where they could not meet face-to-face was very important, and we are the only business to offer this type of immersive and interactive showroom appointment. Interestingly, the majority of customers we speak to have no plans to return to the way things were – even if life returns to normal. Virtual reality was once seen as a marketing gimmick, but it’s now not only a solution to the problems the industry is currently facing, but the obvious answer to reduce costs through travel, physical builds and clothes wastage as well as dramatically improve its environmental footprint.” – Dan O’Connell, co-founder of BrandLab

Typically, buyers sometimes take up to 80 flights a year to visit fashion showrooms, and with that in mind, it is urgent that the fashion sector has to come up with more sustainable solutions.

Like The Sims, buyers are able to virtually browse each showroom through BrandLab's platform, from the comfort of their own homes. Individuals craving interaction can be assigned their own avatar to network with other attendees at the virtual events.

O'Connell added that virtual showrooms are not set to replace all face-to-face interactions. Instead, they will simply be an alternative to enhance and improve productivity in the industry.

“Buyers are often restricted to viewing 10 or so collections, back-to-back, over the course of two days at trade shows. Through a virtual showroom, they could now see up to 200 in this time and then visit the ones they have a particular interest in. It will also allow the industry to become more inclusive – allowing buyers to engage with a wider range of designers they might never have had the time for before.” – Dan O’Connell, co-founder of BrandLab

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