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This Week's Stories

NBC And Samsung Want To Broadcast The Olympics In Virtual Reality

June 30, 2016

But only Samsung smartphone owners will revel in the glory.

The upcoming summer Olympics could be coming your way, three-dimensionally speaking.

NBC said on Thursday that it would broadcast 85 hours of the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 360-degree virtual reality to owners of Samsung smartphones who also have compatible Samsung Gear VR headsets.

The Olympic Broadcasting Services, a broadcasting arm of the International Olympic Committee, will film the games in 360 degrees and send it off to NBC to broadcast internationally.

The Peacock Network said that the 85 hours of VR video will include the opening and closing ceremonies as well as an assortment of competitions, such as men's basketball, gymnastics, track and field, and fencing.

Virtual reality media—like the upcoming Batman videogame that Sony recently showed off during the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) earlier this month—is thought to be more immersive while enabling people to interact with their surroundings.

"The world's greatest sporting event is always a showcase for cutting edge technology, and we're thrilled to partner with Samsung and OBS to bring our viewers even closer to compelling Olympic action with virtual reality," NBC Olympics president Gary Zenkel said in a statement.

"Olympic fans can be transported to iconic venues such as Maracana Stadium for an unprecedented view of the Opening Ceremony, and Copacabana Beach for an immersive beach volleyball experience in the sport's ultimate setting."

As of now, it seems like only Samsung customers will be able to watch the games in VR. NBC also said Samsung is the network's "smartphone partner" for the Olympic Games.

It's unclear if owners of other VR headsets, like the HTC Vive or the Facebook Oculus Rift, will be able to partake in the 360-degree content. Both Samsung and Facebook are partners on the Samsung Gear VR device, with Samsung supplying the hardware components while the Facebook-owned Oculus supplies the software.

An NBC spokesperson confirmed that only Samsung customers will be able to watch the 360 video and said "Virtual Reality (VR) coverage is exclusive to authenticated users of compatible Samsung Galaxy smartphones together with Samsung Gear VR via the NBC Sports app."

fortune.com

Facebook Changes News Feed Algorithm To Prioritize Posts From Friends You Care About

June 29, 2016

Facebook users have been expressing concern that they're missing important updates from the friends they care about most amid a growing sea of posts from contacts, publishers and advertisers. The social media giant took note.

Menlo Park, Calif.-based Facebook said on Wednesday that it is updating its news feed algorithm over the coming weeks to make posts by friends users care about appear higher in users' feeds.

"Facebook was built on the idea of connecting people with their friends and family," Facebook engineering director Lars Backstrom said in a statement. "That is still the driving principle of News Feed today. Our top priority is keeping you connected to the people, places and things you want to be connected to — starting with the people you are friends with on Facebook."

Facebook said it expects Wednesday's update to cause reach and referral traffic to decline for some "Pages," which are typically held by businesses, public figures, publishers and organizations. However, the company noted that if most of a page's traffic is driven by users sharing the page's content, pages will experience less of a traffic dip than those whose views come directly from page posts.

The new algorithm update builds on a change to news feed about a year ago, which included a push to prioritize photos, videos, status updates or links from friends users are most interested in following. Last year's update also took steps to reduce the number of news feed posts about friends liking or commenting on a post and relaxed a previous rule that prevented users from seeing multiple posts in a row in news feed from the same source.

Facebook also unveiled its set of "core values," which it said guides how the company runs news feed. In its memo, Facebook shared its philosophy for serving up content for its 1.65 billion monthly active users. The company said it isn't striving to show users what they "should" consume, but rather what it thinks users will most want to see.

"We are not in the business of picking which issues the world should read about," Facebook VP of product management Adam Mosseri said in a statement. "We are in the business of connecting people and ideas — and matching people with the stories they find most meaningful. Our integrity depends on being inclusive of all perspectives and viewpoints, and using ranking to connect people with the stories and sources they find the most meaningful and engaging."

Facebook said it aims to show content that is informative as well as posts with high entertainment value.

"We do this not only because we believe it's the right thing but also because it's good for our business," Mosseri continued. "When people see content they are interested in, they are more likely to spend time on 'News Feed' and enjoy their experience."

To help control which friends users see most in their feeds, people can "unfollow" friends or label posts as "hide" or "see first" to let Facebook know what they like, or don't.

Facebook came under scrutiny earlier this year after unnamed sources in a Gizmodo story alleged that Facebook was manipulating which articles it displayed in "Trending Topics" to stifle conservative viewpoints. The social media giant responded swiftly, denying the claim and insisting that it found no evidence of systemic bias after an investigation. Facebook then published its 'Trending Topics'

guidelines and held a discussion between its executives, including CEO Mark Zuckerberg, and a number of influential conservative leaders.

Facebook, which first launched news feed in 2006, said it shared its feed guidelines in an effort to be more transparent. The memo describes the feed as “subjective, personal and unique,” and says Facebook doesn’t prioritize specific types of sources or ideological viewpoints. Facebook also said it has a set of community rules to protect users from attacks, hate or harmful behavior and works to minimize posts that users find sensational, spammy or misleading.

“We will be as open as we can — providing explanations in ‘News Feed FYI’ wherever possible and looking for opportunities to share how we work,” Mosseri said.

[forbes.com](#)

Products & Services

PlayStation’s Vue Cord-Cutting TV Service Is Coming To Android

June 29, 2016

Sony Interactive Entertainment expands its live media efforts to Android.

The company is launching its PlayStation Vue subscription-based internet TV service on the Google mobile operating system today.

If you already have a membership, which starts at \$30 per month, you can log in and start watching your shows on the go immediately.

PlayStation Vue was already available on iOS in addition to PS4, PS3, Roku, and Amazon Fire TV. The \$108 billion cable-provider business is dealing with a growing consumer exodus as some people are choosing to “cut the cord” in favor of innovative web-based providers like Netflix, Twitch, and YouTube.

With Vue, Sony is attempting to cause some market disruption of its own by providing live broadcasts of channels like USA, AMC, and ESPN directly over the internet along with DVR-like recording options and video-on-demand.

In addition to the launch of the Android app, Sony has also updated the experience on its consoles. The channel guide on PS4 now puts a video thumbnail of your current show in the corner so that you can keep an eye on the action while seeing what’s on next.

Vue engineers have also introduced a quick-navigation menu that includes the much requested “last channel” button. This new menu is also introducing quicker ways for subscribers to get to their My Shows, Guide, Explore, and Search areas.

These improvements should come as welcome additions to Vue members as should the Android support. And Sony will need to keep its subscribers happy as it isn’t the only player in the web-TV space.

A program called Sling Television offers a similar lineup of channels and starts at \$20 per month. It is on Xbox One as well as mobile and media boxes like Apple TV and Roku.

[venturebeat.com](#)

These Clothes Can Wirelessly Charge Your Phone

June 28, 2016

Hiral Sanghavi is at it again.

Less than a year after the Kickstarter campaign for his BauBax jacket raised a whopping \$9.2 million, he's debuting his next project -- clothes that wirelessly charge your devices.

The project launched Tuesday on Kickstarter with a goal of raising \$100,000. With this line, his Seattle startup Baubax is turning jackets, jeans and shorts into mobile charging stations.

The clothing, which is machine washable, has copper wire built into it and a wireless charging pad that's stitched inside a pocket. You charge an iPhone by putting it into a BauBax iPhone case and slipping it into the pocket. Android phones don't require the case because they have built-in wireless charging capability. The power source is a battery bank that fits into a wallet you carry in the clothes.

Sanghavi said the battery bank can provide one full charge to a smartphone, two charges to a smartwatch and four to bluetooth earphones. The battery bank can be charged with a special BauBax charging pad. It takes two to four hours to recharge the battery bank.

Sanghavi, 30, had the idea for this wireless charging system when he was in Hong Kong. "We were there for meetings with manufacturers. We were using our devices for GPS and other things a lot and constantly draining the battery," he said.

In all, BauBax is designing 27 products for wireless charging, including sweatshirts, jackets and wristlets, which can charge a smartphone inside of it. The clothes range from \$140 to \$170.

The collar in each jacket also features a plug-in point to charge wireless earbuds. A separate charging unit inside the jacket's sleeve can charge an AppleWatch. All the accessories, including the BauBax battery bank, charging pad, iPhone case, wristlet and wallet, are sold separately. The company expects the clothing to be ready for consumers by January 2017. However, the products come with a caveat: people with pacemakers shouldn't use them because the electromagnetic fields may interfere with the pacemakers.

Sanghavi hit a home-run with his first Kickstarter project. His campaign for the BauBax travel jacket -- which has 15 features that do everything from inflating an attached neck pillow to holding your soda can -- was the fourth most-funded on Kickstarter.

His company is already profitable, but it hasn't been without some backlash from consumers. The jacket was expected to be delivered in December and didn't start shipping until early spring.

"There was a four-month delay because we ran into supply chain problems," said Sanghavi. "It was a painful learning experience for us."

He said the vast majority of his 45,000 backers were happy with the travel jacket.

"We did have a 10% to 15% return rate for it," he said, adding that the most common complaints were about it being the wrong size or color.

He said the company is working with new distributors in order to avoid the same problems. For Sanghavi, the second campaign isn't about money, per se.

"This one is about market validation," he said. "We want to know if there really is a need for this type of product."

cnn.com

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"In all, BauBax is designing 27 products for wireless charging, including sweatshirts, jackets and wristlets, which can charge a smartphone inside of it."

Emerging Technology

Pinterest Will Let You Snap Photos To Find Real-Life Products Online

June 28, 2016

“Shopping with Pinterest is meant to be that bridge between getting inspiration and making it part of your real life.”

Pinterest will soon let users snap smartphone photos to shop for items online.

Pinterest announced its new “camera search” tool and a suite of new shopping tools at Pinterest’s San Francisco, Calif. headquarters on Tuesday.

“Our new search tech allows you to shop online for products you find offline in magical moments of inspiration that until now, you haven’t been able to take action on,” Pinterest’s president Tim Kendall said on Tuesday.

‘Camera search,’ which will be available to users within the coming months, will let pinners take a photo of an object in the real world, like a pair of shoes they see on the subway, and find that item and similar products on Pinterest. The company is also making automatic object detection possible through ‘visual search’ on iOS, in which people use photos as search queries. The ‘object detection’ tool allows users to find products within a pin’s image. Users can tap a search icon on the upper right corner of a pin to browse detected items, in addition to manually dragging a cropper to learn more about different objects. Automatic detection begins rolling out today and will be available to all users within the next few weeks.

“Shopping with Pinterest is meant to be that bridge between getting inspiration and making it part of your real life,” Pinterest CEO Ben Silbermann said on Tuesday. “When people go on Pinterest, they are constantly looking for new ideas, which often lead them to buy something at a later time.”

Silbermann announced that “buyable pins,” which were previously only available on iOS, are now also available on the web. Starting today, users will also have a shopping bag that will follow them across devices, allowing them to add products and check out on any device. And Pinterest launched new merchant profiles let users see personalized product recommendations from specific retailers to quickly find new items, what’s on sale and what’s trending.

“Shopping today is this always on cycle: You get ideas, you act on them, you look for new ideas,” said Pinterest user researcher and in-house stylist Larkin Brown. “On Pinterest, shopping doesn’t end with buying. Pinterest gives you ideas for how to dress them up and how to dress them down.”

Users make 130 million visual searches on Pinterest per month and about 2 billion total searches. Now, more than 10 million products can be purchased without leaving Pinterest from more than 20,000 retailers, up from 2 million products when “buyable pins” launched about a year ago. When a user sees a product on Pinterest, they are two times more likely to buy it in-store. And if a merchant promotes the pin, users are five times more likely to buy the item in person, the company said. In testing “buyable pins,” Pinterest said a third of purchases made on the web were first discovered on mobile. More than 80% of users access Pinterest on mobile devices.

Kleiner Perkins Caulfield & Byers partner Mary Meeker noted in her recent 2016 Internet Trends report that 55% percent of people on Pinterest view the site as a place to shop, while by comparison, 12% of users on Facebook and Instagram approach those sites as places to shop.

“We think that a transformative shopping experience is a lot more than drawing a buy button on a product,” Kendall said. “Shopping is about finding your personal taste in a world of options.”

Pinterest, which now has more than 100 million monthly active users, generated about \$100 million in revenue in 2015. The company's headcount is also growing quickly, with about 800 employees and offices in Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Sao Paulo and London, in addition to its San Francisco headquarters. The site first launched six years ago and was valued by investors at \$11 billion when it most recently raised funding last May. The startup recently overhauled its iOS app to be sleeker and faster.

There are now nearly 150 million "save" buttons, formerly "Pin it" buttons, around the web from a range of retailers, brands and publishers. The company has been focusing on the international growth of its users and advertising business, and has been working to make the site better reflect global users' nuanced tastes. Now, more than half of Pinterest's users are based outside of the U.S.

Silbermann has described the company's mission as making a personalized catalog of items and ideas, curated by those you trust and designed to help you navigate daily life. A recent study by IPSOS and Pinterest found that Pinterest is the top ranked app for collecting ideas and is the number one app for moms and millennials planning meals and fitness, project planning and shopping. Users often save pins on the service that help them plan trips, activities or purchases. This year, more pins have been saved from YouTube than any other site. Other popular saved pins come from Etsy, BuzzFeed, Food Network, eBay and Amazon.

forbes.com

Google To Launch Its Own Phone Later This Year

June 27, 2016

Google is planning to launch its own phone later this year in an effort to take more control of its Android platform, The Telegraph reported this morning.

The U.K.-based news outlet said the internet giant is in talks with carriers about the Google-branded device, citing "sources familiar with the discussions."

The report offered no details about features the device might offer or what markets it might be available in.

Google designs its Nexus phones, but the handsets have been manufactured by multiple vendors including Huawei, LG and Motorola Mobility, which Google acquired in 2011 for \$12.5 billion in what looked to be an aggressive move into the mobile hardware market. But Google's device manufacturing effort foundered, and the company sold most of Motorola to Lenovo in 2014.

The company recently hired former Motorola chief Rick Osterloh, however, to lead the company's effort to unify its hardware line.

Osterloh was tapped to oversee a new division that will manage the Nexus line of handsets and tablets as well as Chromebook laptops and other Google gadgets.

Interestingly, Google's sale of Motorola excluded the team working on Project Ara, which develops an open hardware platform for building modular smartphones. Project Ara has since been folded into the Android business but is being managed by Osterloh.

Google hasn't been shy about its ambitions to increasingly focus on hardware in an effort to leverage Android's position as the world's most popular mobile operating system.

CEO Sundar Pichai said recently that the company planned to "be more opinionated about the design" of Nexus handsets, and a Project Ara phone is expected to come to market next year.

"Google hasn't been shy about its ambitions to increasingly focus on hardware in an effort to leverage Android's position as the world's most popular mobile operating system."

As The Verge noted, though, there are reasons to be skeptical that we'll see a Google-branded phone this year. While Android remains an open source platform, Google retains a tremendous amount of control over the platform by prohibiting access to its popular mobile apps to manufacturers that don't conform to its policies.

And by partnering with manufacturers for its Nexus devices, Google can offer stock Android phones free from the customized skins and bloatware manufacturers and carriers use to differentiate their Android gadgets.

Google is clearly honing its focus on mobile hardware, but whether that means we'll see the company start churning out phones this year is far from clear.

fiercewireless.com

Mergers and Acquisitions

Apple Might Buy Jay Z's Tidal Music App

June 30, 2016

If you can't beat 'em, buy 'em. Apple is in discussions with Tidal about acquiring its music streaming app, which offers exclusives and early releases from big artists like Beyonce and Kanye West.

The Wall Street Journal reports that the talks are still early and might not end in a deal, but Apple wants those exclusives to bolster its Apple Music streaming app that's currently in hard-fought competition with Spotify.

Apple has been pushing to score exclusives of its own, like the release of Drake's most recent album. But Tidal has been winning on that front.

Rapper Jay Z bought Tidal for \$56 million in March 2015, then revamped it with a set of landmark partnerships with some of the biggest names in music, including venture as co-owners: Alicia Keys, Calvin Harris, Arcade Fire, Chris Martin from Coldplay, Beyonce, Daft Punk, Jack White, J. Cole, Jason Aldean, Kanye West, Deadmau5, Madonna, Nicki Minaj, Rihanna and Usher.

In a pompous declaration-signing ceremony, Tidal made these stars co-owners in exchange for them giving it first crack at releasing their music. While that arrangement seemed unlikely to pan out at first, Tidal was the only place to stream Kanye's new album "Life Of Pablo" for several weeks, and is still the only place you can stream Beyonce's visual album "Lemonade".

Apple sees music as a big part of the future of mobile, and as a way to encourage sales of its flagship iPhones. Even if it had to pay a steep price for Tidal, its exclusives could give it a big edge over Spotify, which has concentrated on listening features like Discover Weekly instead.

If Apple does buy Tidal, it could be good for listeners, who are facing a balkanized music catalog divided between the different streaming apps. To listen to the new Drake and the new Kanye, you'd need two almost entirely redundant \$10 per month subscriptions. If Spotify gets serious about exclusives thanks to the hire of former Lady Gaga manager and tech investor Troy Carter, things could get even worse.

Apple Music now has 15 million paying subscribers, compared to Spotify's 30 million paying subscribers and 100 million active listeners.

While Apple Music has been growing fast, the company might want to buy Tidal to accelerate user acquisition of people who've never really used streaming services. That could be easier now than going it alone without Tidal and having to wrestle listeners away from Spotify later when they've become entrenched with playlists and personalization.

Apple is already criticized for using its ownership of the App Store and iOS operating system to hinder competition from Spotify.

Apple owning Tidal would certainly give listeners fewer options. But if it puts the best new music all in one app, even loyal Spotify users might switch to a Tidal-powered Apple Music.

techcrunch.com

Uber Partners With Hertz To Expand Short-Term Car Rental Program

June 28, 2016

Uber Technologies partnered this week with Hertz, one of the world's largest car rental companies, to offer short-term auto rentals to ride-hailing drivers -- a move intended to court new drivers and keep current ones on the road.

The partnership, which launches in Los Angeles and will be rolled out to other U.S. cities in the coming months, will allow approved Uber drivers to rent a car from Hertz to drive for the ride-hailing company.

The weekly rentals cost \$180, which includes auto insurance, unlimited miles, vehicle maintenance and 24/7 roadside assistance.

Uber has a similar agreement with Enterprise, which charges drivers \$210 a week. Uber competitor Lyft also offers a short-term rental program through General Motors, starting at \$99 with conditions. Outside of these programs, car rental companies typically do not allow customers to drive for Uber and Lyft.

Uber's short-term rental programs are different from the company's Xchange Leasing program, which offers longer contracts with the option to buy vehicles outright at the end of a lease.

Although the partnerships with Hertz and Enterprise are more expensive than traditional dealership leases, Uber is marketing them as an option for drivers who either need a short-term solution, or are trying out Uber for the first time.

"We have seen that both new and existing drivers use weekly rentals," said Uber spokesman Michael Amodeo. "New drivers may use the weekly rental to give driving with Uber a try. Existing drivers have used the weekly rental options to stay on the road when their car is in the shop."

For Hertz, which tries to maintain a fleet of cars that are less than 3 years old, a partnership with Uber gives its older cars a second life. "It lets us redeploy cars that rotate out of our consumer rental fleet that we think are a great option for ride-sharing," said Hertz spokesman William Masterson.

Uber does not take a cut of the rental fee.

Partnerships like this one pit the incumbent car rental industry against newer start-ups that have cropped up to serve ride-hailing drivers.

"The partnership, which launches in Los Angeles and will be rolled out to other U.S. cities in the coming months, will allow approved Uber drivers to rent a car from Hertz to drive for the ride-hailing company."

Marciano Kim, chief executive of Los Angeles-based short-term car rental start-up HyreCar, believes there's room for competition, though.

"A lot of drivers don't like being locked into conglomerate programs," said Kim, whose company matches drivers who need a car with individuals looking to rent out their under-utilized vehicles -- a kind of Airbnb for cars.

The California Public Utilities Commission is currently deciding whether short-term rentals should be eligible for use as Uber and Lyft vehicles.

mobile-tech-today.com

Industry Reports

iPhone Coming To T-Mobile's MetroPCS Prepaid Brand

June 30, 2016

The wait is over. T-Mobile on Thursday announced the iPhone is finally headed to its MetroPCS prepaid brand.

According to the carrier, the iPhone 6s and 6s Plus, as well as the iPhone SE and iPhone 5s, will be available in MetroPCS stores in Florida starting Friday. Nationwide availability will follow "soon," the carrier said.

MetroPCS will offer the iPhone 6s and 6s Plus for \$649 and \$749, respectively. The iPhone SE and 5s will be offered for \$349 and \$199, respectively. The change will help MetroPCS better compete with AT&T's prepaid brand, Cricket, which already offers the iPhone in its device lineup.

Like T-Mobile, MetroPCS offers customers no contract service and access to T-Mobile's Data Maximizer technology. The brand also offers unlimited music streaming from 33 music services, and international talk, text and data in Canada and Mexico to customers on the \$40 per month plan or higher.

wirelessweek.com

Samsung Selling Unlocked Galaxy S7, S7 Edge In US

June 30, 2016

In an effort to appeal to its growing base of customers, Samsung is now offering its Galaxy S7 and Galaxy S7 Edge smartphones unlocked in the US.

Samsung made unlocked versions of its Galaxy S7 and S7 Edge flagship smartphones available to US consumers on June 30. Unlocked handsets appeal to those seeking an escape from heavy-handed carrier customizations, but they're also aimed at travelers who might wish to use their phones on other networks when overseas.

Most phones sold in the US today are locked, which means they can only be used for the carrier that sells them.

If you buy a Samsung Galaxy S7 from AT&T, you won't be able to use the phone on any network other than AT&T's no matter what SIM card you stuff inside. This is the way carriers want it.

Some carrier phones that are fully paid off or no longer under contract may be unlocked, but this requires asking the carrier directly and sometimes carries a fee (usually \$20).

Unlocked phones have been around for years. They offer plenty of benefits, with a catch. The majority of phones sold unlocked must be paid for at full retail price, often online, and aren't available through those convenient monthly payment plans. Many believe the rewards are worth the cost, and so the prevalence of unlocked phones has been growing in recent years. In fact, unlocked handsets accounted for 9% of all device sales in 2015, according to Strategy Analytics.

This month alone has seen a handful of handsets reach the unlocked market. For example, Sony made the Xperia X available to consumers online, as did Freetel with the Kiwami. OnePlus's latest smartphone, the OnePlus 3, went on sale recently, sold unlocked. The Moto G4 and Blu R1 HD will be sold unlocked next month, and the new Motorola Z Droid and Z Droid Force will be sold unlocked in the fall. You get the picture. Samsung knows it needs to tap into this market, which is why the Galaxy S7 and S7 Edge are now available unlocked.

The unlocked S7 and S7 Edge are identical to the carrier-branded variants as far as the hardware is concerned. That means they have the same screen, the same processor, the same camera, the same amount of storage, the same battery, and the same waterproofing.

There are two major differences, owners will be able to use them on any network around the world and the phones have no carrier bloatware.

Samsung says the unlocked devices support GSM, HSPA, CDMA, and several versions of LTE for maximum compatibility with worldwide networks. The S7 and S7 Edge can be used on AT&T, Boost Mobile, Cricket Wireless, MetroPCS, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon Wireless, Virgin Mobile, and other carriers in the US without issue. Traveling to Europe this summer, or headed to Rio for the Olympics? Buy a local SIM card, pop it in your unlocked Galaxy S7, and enjoy low-cost cellular service while traveling.

You might shrug your shoulders about the lack of carrier bloatware, but you shouldn't. The carrier-branded versions of the Galaxy S7 and S7 Edge are crammed with ridiculous and unnecessary apps, services, and tools that hog up system resources and incessantly assail owners with ads, alerts, and popups. No bloatware means more room for the apps you actually want to use and fewer annoyances.

Samsung noted that the unlocked Galaxy S7 and S7 Edge are available from Samsung.com, as well as Amazon, Best Buy, Ebay, Sam's Club, and Target.com. The S7 costs \$669.99 and the S7 Edge costs \$769.99.

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