

## IMAX to Bring VR Mainstream

Written by Bob Snyder  
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**IMAX Corporation** wants to push virtual reality into mainstream—and for that they’ve partnered with **Google** and signed a joint venture agreement with Swedish games studio (and hardware creator) **Starbreeze**.

After building an VR ecosystem of alliances, IMAX will now develop a premium, location-based virtual reality offering (entertainment content and games) for commercial destinations like multiplexes, malls, museums and other.

IMAX’s VR experience will use the StarVR headset technology. Starbreeze’s headsets provide a 210-degree full peripheral “IMAX-like” field-of-view — twice that of any other VR headset currently out there.

IMAX CEO Richard Gelfond says, “We believe VR is an area that holds tremendous promise and is a natural progression for IMAX given our established worldwide brand presence, our immersive entertainment technology know-how, and strong industry relationships with filmmakers, studios and exhibitors.”

The first IMAX VR location has been selected (but not disclosed). IMAX will launch “up to six sites this year in both domestic and international markets”. If successful, the concept will then

roll out globally.

**IMAX used the recent Google's I/O developer conference to announce that it is working with Google to develop a "cinema-grade virtual reality (VR) camera" – another aspect of its overall VR strategy.**

The IMAX VR camera will be designed "from the ground up" by IMAX engineers and camera specialists, in partnership with Google, and will use the latter's Jump platform (a camera rig with 16 camera modules in a circular array) for creating and viewing 3D 360 video. Google will have exclusive access to pre-existing IMAX documentary footage for conversion and use within the VR world.

While some industry observers predict the beginning of VR feature films, (and surely some new director will think it's a James Cameron-loke move to do so), we think Gelfond has a different vision.

In his investor's conference, Gelfond said, "a movie-goer may see Star Wars, for example, at the multiplex. Then, after the film ends, they may pay for a premium VR experience around the Star Wars IP in the same complex. You'd go to a different place in the multiplex and put on VR glasses and you would fly the Millennium Falcon or see how many stormtroopers you can shoot."

To us that sounds right: instead of dragging Hollywood (not easy!) along, IMAX can create its own game-like experiences based on Hollywood content. IMAX can supplement Hollywood blockbusters.

IMAX will work with Starbreeze's library of VR entertainment content and games and leverage Starbreeze's partnerships in the gaming industry.

Lionsgate and Starbreeze currently are developing a John Wick VR game. John Wick fans can predict what John Wick would have to say as VR's new poster boy, "People keep asking me if I'm back. And I really haven't had an answer. But now, yeah, I'm thinkin' I'm back!"

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