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Five Years of VR: A Look at the Greatest Moments from Oculus Rift to Quest 2

[Blog](#) | Posted by [Hayden Dingman](#) |

Mar 29, 2021 |   

We released Oculus Rift in March 2016. It was a big moment, the launch of the first consumer VR headset of the modern era. And it was just the start. Rift, Go, Quest, Rift S, and Quest 2—we've released five headsets in the past five years, with each driving the technology forward and enabling major improvements in how people interact with VR and the experiences developers can offer.

The gamepad that shipped with Rift gave way to our Oculus Touch controllers, letting people reach out and grab the virtual world. We did away with external sensors in favor of inside-out tracking so that setup would be easier. And we cut the cord with Quest and Quest 2, so that you could take VR anywhere and everywhere—while still connecting to a PC to experience some of the high points of the last five years in VR gaming, including [Lone Echo](#) and [Asgard's Wrath](#).

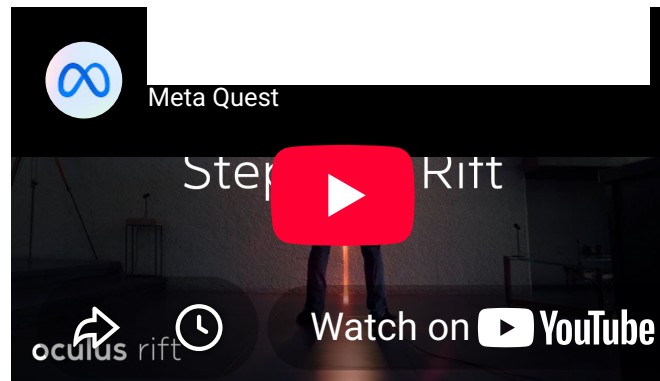
Oh, and a *lot* of you fell in love with [Beat Saber](#).

It's been an extraordinary five years, and we're just getting started. As our Chief Scientist Michael Abrash is fond of saying, "We are at the very beginning of what's going to be a 50-year arc." But we wanted to take a moment to celebrate the achievements of so many, both inside and outside the walls of Facebook, who have contributed to making VR what it is today.

And if you reach the end and would like to read more, please check out [our longer oral history of the first five years of consumer VR](#) where you can learn about how *Beat Saber* almost didn't exist, how *Lone Echo* started life on a controller, and more. Without further ado...

Oculus Rift – March

2016



Oculus's history didn't start with the release of Rift, of course. Before that, there was the Kickstarter—a crowdfunding campaign to raise money for DK1, which registered when your head rotated but nothing else. No position-tracking, and certainly no controller tracking. Even so, it was magical and by 2014 Facebook had acquired Oculus with a vision of VR as the next computing platform.

Rift was the first step down that road, a \$599 USD fabric-covered headset with flip-down headphones, an external sensor, a remote, and an Xbox controller. It released alongside *Edge of Nowhere*, *EVE Valkyrie*, *Chronos*, *Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes*, and more.

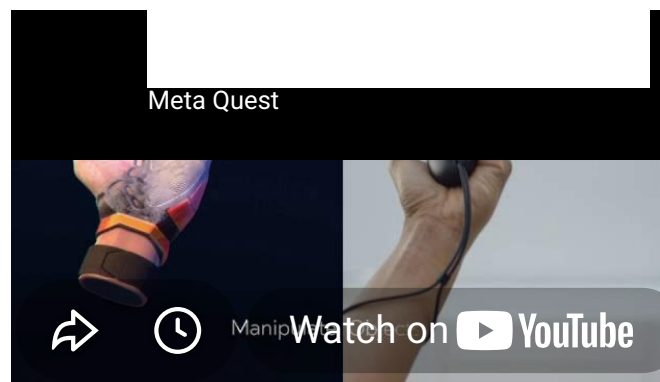
Peter Bristol – Head of Industrial Design for FRL: VR had this inevitable feel to it. It felt like it was going to be as big as the internet or something. Like, this was as important a technology as you could

possibly work on.

Caitlin Kalinowski – Head of VR

Hardware: I give credit to Peter [Bristol]’s team. They took a really ugly prototype, Crescent Bay, and figured out how to package it into a beautiful and elegant piece of consumer electronics. The fabric application, figuring out how to integrate audio into the straps...I think it established what consumer VR would be. Almost all VR since then has been derivative of Rift CV1 in some way. It showed people that VR could be a consumer product.

Oculus Touch Launch – December 2016



The Touch controllers followed nine months after Rift. Thanks to Carbon Design's rigorous attention to detail and ergonomics, Touch enabled players to essentially bring their hands into the virtual world. That hand presence ended

up being a key turning point for VR, with games like *Robo Recall*, *SUPERHOT VR*, *Arizona Sunshine*, *The Unspoken*, and *The Gallery* exploring the possibilities of this new control scheme and paving the way for *Lone Echo*, *Beat Saber*, *Asgard's Wrath*, and countless others. By the following summer, Rift and Touch were permanently bundled together.

Jason Rubin – VP, Play: Touch was more than an input device. We gave a developer the Touch controllers, it changed the way they thought about VR.

Peter Bristol – Head of Industrial Design for FRL: We probably made hundreds of models—just simple sticks with clay, crumpled paper, sanded foams, et cetera—trying to figure out how to get the ergonomics to work. The idea of the controllers becoming your hands set the trajectory of the entire program. We were trying to get your hands into this natural pose while holding the controllers, so that your virtual hands matched your real hands. We also developed movements like the grip trigger to be similar to motions you use in the real world, so it would feel intuitive to use.

Shaun McCabe – Head of Technology, Insomniac Games: One of my favorite memories of Touch involved my Mom. She visited our office when we were working on *The Unspoken* and got to try it

out. She was 70 at the time and never grokked how to use a controller, but I remember telling her what button to press to throw a fireball and then telling her, “Now throw it”. She nailed the target on her first try!

Shouldn’t have been a surprise; she’s a heck of a softball player. But it really underscored how Touch opened the doors to a whole range of players.

Oculus Go - May 2018



Oculus Go was our first headset post-Rift, but it had less in common with its PC-centric sibling than it did with Gear VR, an earlier phone-based partnership between Oculus and Samsung. Go reimaged the media-centric Gear VR as an all-in-one device—our first—with better lenses and longer battery life, a sleek new strap-based audio solution, higher resolution screens, and a mainstream-friendly \$199 USD price

point.

Nicole Brendis – Product Marketing:

John Carmack is really the person that pushed for the creation of Oculus Go. He was super passionate about it, and about making VR less complex. And he was very keen on content discovery as well. There were a lot of partnerships with National Geographic and such that Oculus Go really helped us explore. Carmack worked really hard on getting that content on Go and making it discoverable, with the understanding that it would attract different types of users and developers. It really set the tone for Horizon and a lot of the other non-gaming experiences that we're building today.

Matt Dickman – TPM, Health and Safety:

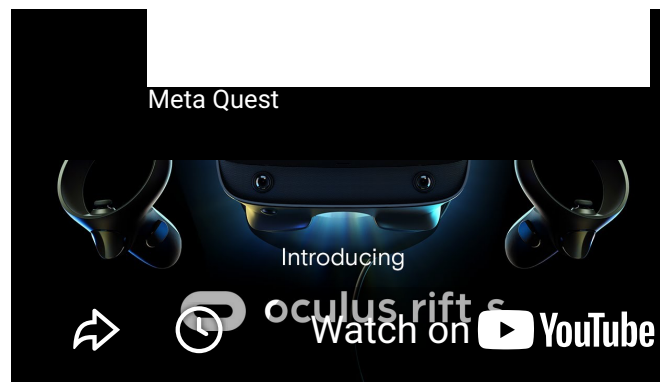
Go was the first time we really thought intentionally about accessibility and what that might mean in VR. You look at the attachment points inside the headset. Those were designed to hold the fabric interface originally—but you could repurpose those mounts to accommodate prescription lens inserts. That sort of thinking around comfort and ergonomics takes a long time (and internal design support) but it led to the accessories you see on Quest 2 today.

Chris Pruett – Director of Content

Ecosystem: We learned a ton from Go. Quest wouldn't have existed without Go

existing first.

Oculus Quest and Rift S - May 2019



In May 2019 we released two headsets on the same day: Rift S and Quest. Two visions of the future. Each sported a state-of-the-art inside-out tracking solution ([Oculus Insight](#)), higher resolution panels, and a \$399 USD price tag. They offered very different experiences though, with Rift S a refinement of our previous PC efforts and Quest a groundbreaking all-in-one device that offered a relatively comparable experience without wires or any additional hardware, making VR more accessible to more people—and helping developers reach new, larger audiences in the process.

By the end of 2019, [Oculus Link](#) allowed players to connect Quest to a PC for a best-of-both-worlds experience. And in

2019, the addition of [an innovative hand tracking solution](#) gave Quest users a glimpse of a more natural and intuitive VR future.

Nick Everist – Product Manager, Rift S /

VR Input Devices: I see Rift S as a workhorse. Kind-of an unsung hero workhorse. It brought a lot of new users into VR and into the PC ecosystem. The quality of tracking, the ease of setup. It's also incredibly comfortable, thanks to the halo strap. It has outperformed where we ever thought it would for sure, and it's done really, really well.

Atman Binstock – Chief Architect of

Oculus VR: I always believed that long-term, standalone VR would be the path forward. The question was more of when. My personal belief was that something like Rift and Touch was the experience we'd need to deliver on standalone. Not the same level of performance as a PC, but the self-presence, interaction, and social-presence. We're competing for people's time with TVs, with laptops. Making the product easier to use, making "time to fun" lower—that's huge.

Thomas Van Bouwel – Developer,

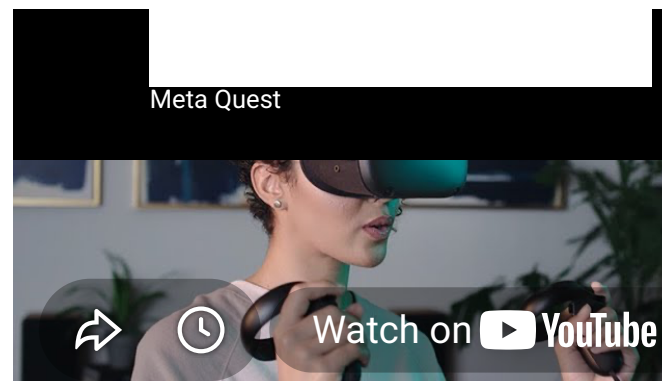
***Cubism*:** Without Quest, more niche games like [Cubism](#) would likely not be sustainable, but Quest's audience seems to be large and diverse enough for me to afford to work full time on the game. It's

been great to see Quest turn the promise of accessible and affordable consumer VR into a reality over the last few years.

Brendan Walker – Principal Engineer,

Polyarc: When I first started working on VR, I really wanted to show other people what I was working on and other amazing VR demos. This involved hauling my bulky demo PC around with me, which I did on many occasions. With the Quest, I was finally able to take a headset with me and show someone VR without any qualifiers attached. I once took my Quest with me to a bachelor party and converted three people to VR users with one demo of [Beat Saber](#).

Oculus Insight



Oskar Linde – Machine Perception

Architect: I got a phone call from this guy, Mark Zuckerberg. He had just acquired Oculus, I think two days earlier, and he was telling me his product vision for Oculus. It was pretty interesting to hear because his vision was basically Oculus

Quest, I would say.

I believe some people at Oculus had told him that that was basically impossible. You needed something he called inside-out tracking, and the technology was still far from being ready—especially with the limited compute offered by mobile devices. But apparently Mark didn't take them at their word. He went out and did his own research, he found me and my company, and he sold me on this vision of building a standalone VR headset.

Ryan Brown – Engineer, DK2 / Rift /

Quest: I think a lot of people thought that doing inside-out tracking on a mobile platform was not really possible in the near term. Facebook deserves credit there, because inside-out tracking was a risky long-term investment that required a lot of foresight.

Anna Kozminski – Software Program

Manager, Insight: Christmas lights were a thing we really had to contend with for controller tracking. The rings on the controllers have these infrared LEDs. That's what we're tracking—and from a computer vision point of view, these clusters of LED lights and a Christmas tree look basically identical.

We had to go to the store and buy every kind of Christmas lights you could possibly have. Our engineers had Christmas trees next to their desks and

their desks were strung up in Christmas lights way past Christmas so they could [make sure everything worked.](#)

Oculus Link



Nick Everist – Product Manager, Rift S / VR Input Devices: We didn't necessarily think it was possible to hit the quality bar we wanted for PC VR, at least in the short-term, with Quest and Link. The USB-C ecosystem was not necessarily widespread with consumers quite yet, and we didn't really know what was possible.

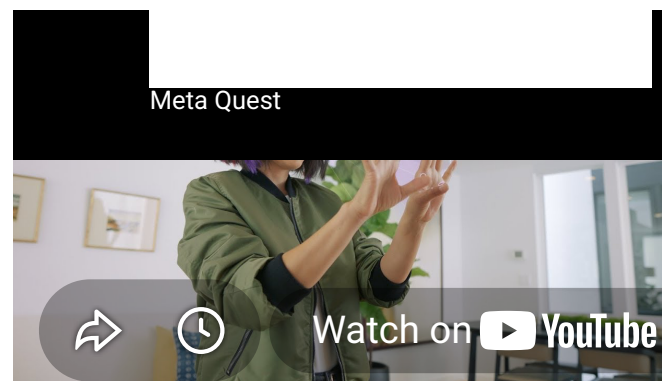
I think Link surprised a lot of people at how quickly it was able to actually be *a thing*.

Amanda Watson – Software Engineer, GearVR / Quest / Link: I think the coolest thing about Oculus Link was that it was kind-of the first project where the PC and mobile VR people at Oculus worked together to build something. It was really, really cool figuring out how to architect

that. These were a lot of the old-school Oculus people that had worked on CV1 and just had a really cool idea and wanted to see it happen.

Every time we hit a bug during development, we'd always think "Oh, is this the end? Is this the fundamental ceiling of latency?" It was always just another bug.

Hand Tracking



Michael Abrash – Chief Scientist, Facebook Reality Labs: In terms of interaction, maybe the single biggest breakthrough is hand tracking. Controllers are useful, but you don't walk around the world with them, right? Hand tracking opens up the possibility of interacting with the virtual world in a more natural and lower-friction way. You just put the headset on and bam, you can do things.

Jenny Spurlock – Engineering Director, Input Explorations: In the beginning, it

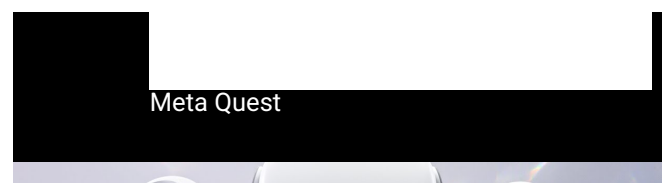
was just us working deeply with research to figure out the technology and how it might benefit users. We built a lot of experimental prototypes early on just trying to figure out what hands do or enable in VR. Then we started to look at “How can we make this a usable interaction?”

Rob Wang – Research Lead for Hands:

My team was involved with hand tracking from the research side, but getting hand tracking onto Quest was a whole different challenge and required a heroic effort on the product side.

One team basically hand-wrote an extremely fast neural network accelerator on-chip and that made a huge difference, and then a second team—they’re a one-stop shop for taking these large and complex neural network models and making them much smaller and more efficient. Without the help of those two teams, we wouldn’t have been able to ship.

Oculus Quest 2 - October 2020





Quest 2 released a year-and-a-half after its predecessor, and our goal was to give both players and developers a higher-powered and more customizable device—and do it for \$100 USD less. That goal went from hard to harder when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, but we managed to ship Quest 2 in October and are already so proud of its success and the success it's brought developers.

Rangaprabhu Parthasarathy – Product Manager, Quest / Quest 2: When we started Quest 2, we looked at all the things we did on the original Quest and CV1 and said what do we need in a mass market device? Affordable. Easy to use. Think about the setup process. Think about accessibility. Make it available in more places, make it friendly. Find all kinds of games—it should not just play one genre of games.

Paint a picture where you give people something they want to get into every day.

Vicki Dobbs Beck – Executive in Charge, ILMxLAB: Quest 2 has become our favorite headset just for ease of use and freedom of movement—not to mention it delivers relatively high-fidelity imagery

and sound, something that's very important to us at ILMxLAB.

Denny Unger – CEO & Creative Director, Cloudhead Games: The Quest 2, in so many ways, hits the sweet spot for what a modern VR headset should be capable of. No cable, no external sensors, full 6DOF, hardware-based and visual hand tracking, high-resolution panels at 90hz, awesome catalog, and hyper-affordable. It's the quintessential sci-fi VR device that can be thrown in a backpack, used anywhere—and has the capacity to link to a powerhouse PC for more intensive experiences.

Ruth Bram – Executive Producer, Oculus Studios: We recently shared the news that [developers are generating millions on the Oculus platform](#). This didn't happen overnight. We funded numerous developers over the years to help kickstart a now-robust ecosystem, helped small devs become medium-sized devs, partnered medium-sized with awesome IP, and we even built our own development team to discover and publish best practices that we still use today. Even so, I never would've predicted that this is where we'd be five years ago.

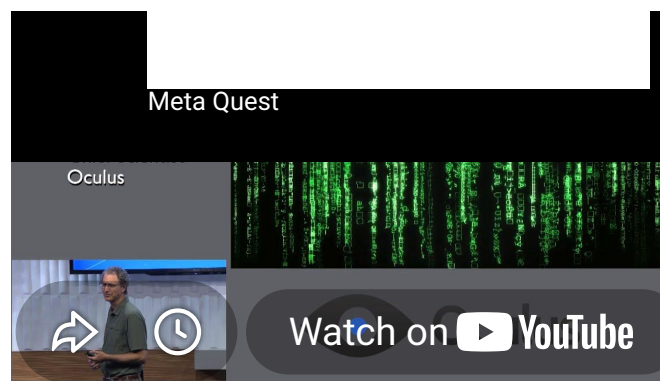
Ruan Rothmann – Lead Designer, *GORN*: It's less than a month since we released [GORN](#) on Quest, and it already looks like

Quest might turn out to be our most successful platform!

The simplicity of use for the headset has also reinvigorated our love for VR and we are talking about maybe making more VR content in the future as a direct result.

Mike Verdu – VP, Content: I remember when gaming was emerging on consoles and PC, and there was this golden age where you'd see innovative new games come out all the time, and think, "Wow, I just had no idea that you could do that—not just on any single platform, but period." And we're in that same sort of golden age with VR.

The Next Five Years



What comes next? Michael Abrash has been making predictions about Oculus's future since the very first Oculus Connect, so we asked him. You can read his full response in [our oral history](#), but the short answer is: We're exploring a lot. Eye tracking. High-resolution panels and

refined optics that eliminate the so-called “screen door effect” for good. HDR, so that outdoor scenes seem more realistic. The ability to share spaces with people and feel like you’re actually there with them—or at least, have richer and more impactful social interactions than we do now. These are all ideas we're investigating for the future, and there are thousands of people working tirelessly to make it happen, not just at Facebook but at development studios around the world.

We’re very grateful to everyone who’s helped make VR real over the last five-plus years, including everyone who’s bought a headset, or even shared a headset with their friends and family. Here’s to five more years and beyond.

Michael Abrash – Chief Scientist, Facebook Reality Labs: We are at the very beginning. All this innovation, all this invention still has to happen with VR.

Early VR rode on the back of other work that had been done. The cameras were cellphone cameras and the optics were basically off-the-shelf optics initially. Going from this point forward, we’re the ones who are developing it—and that’s exciting. It’s good. But it is also really, really challenging on the innovation front.

People should realize that we’ve come a long way and we’ve done a great job—but

this road stretches out for the rest of their lifetimes.

As we said, there's more where this came from. We've put together [a much longer oral history](#) for those who want to dig deeper. Want to know how *Beat Saber* saved Quest? Or learn about the Touch controller...with a touchpad? You'll find that and more in our exhaustive deep dive into the first five years of consumer VR.

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