

Using Virtual Travel to Build a Technology and Innovation Hub



World XR Forum and SOMNIACS

The World XR Forum was looking for a way to increase its visibility as a pioneering leader in the virtual reality (VR) world as well as to show off its home, Crans-Montana, Switzerland as a hub for cutting edge technologies and innovative ideas.

To do this, they launched the Birdly virtual travel lounge for a two-month test period during the winter season. Crans-Montana is a lively resort and tourist destination that offers world class outdoors experiences during both summer and winter. However, it is not often recognized as an innovation and technology hub or a home to VR experiences like Birdly.

The Virtual Travel Lounge

Using a unique format, the World XR team launched Birdly as the centerpiece of a virtual travel lounge located in a sleek, modern gallery at the heart of the business district. Guests were invited to experience fifteen minutes of virtual travel including three Birdly flights of their choice and a soundtrack they selected at the start.

Friends and family members were treated to the trappings of a travel experience as well, including a beverage service, additional XR (extended reality) experiences to experiment with and promotional items to take with them as souvenirs.

In addition to capitalizing on the entertainment value, the World XR Forum promoted the virtual travel lounge as a wellness destination. Understanding that there was a wealth of pent-up demand due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they afforded visitors a few minutes of complete freedom and immersion. In a year without travel, visitors were able to travel without limitations through the power of VR.

Results

The World XR Forum has achieved great results with Birdly. Customer response has been overwhelmingly positive. Visitors found the pricing fair, the staff welcoming and the experience an immersive, emotional, incredible interlude to their time in Crans-Montana. In addition, the team from the World XR Forum found that these kinds of ideas and products helped attract new visitors to the area, furthering their vision for the future and helping to create a capital for extended reality in Switzerland.

Financially, this endeavor has also been a success, generating nearly 15,000 Swiss Francs in two months. While the initial trial



Location:
Crans-Montana,
Switzerland

Study Dates:
12. February – 19. April 2021

Business Model:
3 Flights for CHF 20; 15
kids under 12

Challenges

Offer a world-class tourist experience that showcases the power of virtual reality, promotes wellness through tourism, and draws visitors into a new world. Prove the long-term value of the Birdly platform to a tourist location.

Key Results

51%
of visitors
had never
tried VR
before

87%
of visitors
rated their
experience
5 or higher
on a scale
of 1-6

Creating the virtual travel lounge around Birdly allowed us to show what’s possible if you combine world class VR with a thirst for tourism and exploration.

Salar Shahna
World XR Forum

period shows World XR Forum breaking even in terms of overall costs, this is largely due to the up-front costs required to secure the initial rental. The long-term revenue generation potential shows an expectation of positive ROI within 3-4 months of initiating the rental and within one year when purchasing Birdly. Additionally, SOMNIACS and World XR forum have identified multiple additional revenue opportunities including flight club memberships, in-experience sponsorships, and merchandising options that will add to the overall profitability of the operation.

Next Steps

Given the overall success of this project, the World XR Forum plans to move forward with a purchase of Birdly and an extension of the project. They will build on the positive reaction within the community, creating a coalition of local stakeholders to fund the purchase of what will become a collective good for Crans-Montana community. While this shared asset will primarily be on location at the virtual travel lounge, it will also be made available to each stakeholder at different times throughout the year.

To increase both the local appeal and international reach of the World XR Forum and their coalition of partners they will continue to work with SOMNIACS to create a series of customized VR and XR tourist experiences to be flown on Birdly. Initially, these will be passive experiences based on 360 video from drone flights taken during local events or detailing specific perspectives around the area. In the meantime, using high-resolution photogrammetry scans SOMNIACS will create a complete, interactive Crans-Montana experience in VR that will allow stakeholders to capitalize on unique branding opportunities and advance their interests both locally and on the Birdly network worldwide.

Through Birdly and the virtual travel lounge, World XR Forum will continue to bring new visitors to Crans-Montana and further develop its reputation as a hub for technology and innovation. Stay tuned.

