

D-BOX Technologies

Company Showcase

- **Type of company:** VR motion technology – haptic feedback devices
- **Established:** 1992
- **Year began working in VR:** 2015
- **Location(s):** Montreal, Quebec with facilities in Los Angeles, California and Beijing, China
- **Company Size:** 120 Employees
- **Website:** <http://d-box.com/>

This Montreal-based technology company began with the aim of adding another layer of credible entertainment to the movie-watching experience. One success led to another and, today, D-BOX is helping to amplify Hollywood's biggest blockbuster experiences around the world with leading-edge motion-coding technology.

Company origins

The genesis of D-BOX started long before the recent breakthroughs in virtual reality. In the early days, the firm began exploring the connections between music and motion and spent considerable resources developing ways to better immerse audiences in the films they were watching. Using subtlety and precision, they built proprietary technology that created a connection between the audio and video to make people actually feel the narrative.

In essence, D-BOX has designed what it describes as a “high fidelity motion system” that integrates motion effects into a platform such as a seat and perfectly manipulates the movements to match the visual content. The result is that the viewer experiences perfect synchronization between what they are seeing on screen and the subtle motions of the seat they are sitting in.

Pursuing growth and virtual reality

Launched by CFC Media Lab with founding partner OMERS Ventures in collaboration with Nordicity, *Pulse on VR: A Living Ecosystem* presents an ongoing snapshot of the Canadian Virtual Reality (VR) ecosystem as it evolves. *Pulse on VR: A Living Ecosystem* is generously supported by the Ontario Media Development Corporation (OMDC), the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, On-Screen Manitoba (OSM), New Media Manitoba (NMM), Creative BC, Canada Media Fund (CMF-FMC), Telefilm Canada, SODEC and Super Ventures.

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D-BOX began sharing its vision in 2009 but many studios were reluctant to embrace the technology, perceiving it to be a gimmick. With thousands of tests and demos under their belt, D-BOX was confident its motion system was a premium enhancement that audiences would be willing to pay more to experience. Eventually, studios and theatre owners came around and it wasn't long before, D-BOX was put to the test at the TCL Chinese Theatres in Hollywood with *The Fast and the Furious*. It was the company's first major studio release and a total success that guaranteed their place in future chapters of this Hollywood franchise.

Since 2010, cinemas utilizing the technology have reported that, even with the upfront investment, D-BOX is a revenue generator (approximately \$8 extra per ticket) and keeps audiences coming back to the theatre.

With that kind of success, it was only natural for them to look towards VR as the next logical place to focus on. In 2015, clients such as SONY were keen to integrate D-BOX's motion system into their VR content. At the time, one of the challenges was the concern about motion sickness. However, by enhancing the believability of a given piece of content, D-BOX's motion system would reduce the chance of audience's feeling unwell. The opportunity to demonstrate its effectiveness came in a promotional piece for the horror film *Goosebumps*. D-BOX's team met with SONY to develop a demo of a VR trailer for the film, that was featured in ten cities across North America. Utilizing D-BOX's kiosks, the immersive promo was experienced by over 20,000 people aged six- to-seventy-six and was deemed a resounding success. The Goosebumps buzz led to subsequent contracts with SONY, FOX and other studios and the development of groundbreaking spinoff experiences from Hollywood blockbusters like *The Martian* - cementing virtual reality as a key vertical for the firm.

Key success factors

Michel Paquette, VP Marketing for D-BOX, credits several factors for D-BOX's global success. He describes the motion technology as having a viral quality – “once you try it, it is difficult to imagine a VR experience without it.” He explains that his team are practically magicians because “no one understands the fundamental science of timing, precision, sound and motion better than they do.”

D-BOX lends believability, credibility and even emotion to the VR experience and never detracts from the content. Plus, the motion technology helps address a key VR pain point – motion dizziness. “Human DNA naturally tries to connect the

enhanced visual and sound triggers created by VR with our inner ear equilibrium system,” explains Paquette. “If you don’t move with some of the VR experiences, then chances are you won’t feel well.”

The company also benefits from its trusted partnerships with commercial theatres and studios, established long before virtual reality was a market reality. In this way, D-BOX was already a proven entity when these same partners needed collaborators in a far more uncertain and experimental space. As the VR landscape evolves and expands, many companies are simply not able to deliver on their promises. D-BOX prides itself on its ability to hustle and deliver what its clients and partners need.

Looking ahead

D-BOX has successfully integrated its technologies with gaming engines and understands that video games are a huge component of seizing the virtual reality marketplace. *The Martian* experience was a real-time interface linked with an UNREAL gaming engine. What’s more, another project has been developed with Ubisoft for their successful Raving Rabbids franchise. While D-BOX’s roots are firmly in cinema, VR is potentially the next media to watch for. The challenge is whether it becomes marginalized as more of a theme-park type of experience or truly becomes another level of mass entertainment. As for cinema, D-BOX is bringing visibility and realism to audience participation in games within cinemas. While D-BOX is mainly focused on the creative community and storytelling for now, it is also pursuing other markets including training/education and simulation. In addition to their enviable success with the premium theatrical market, they have also been making inroads in the world of high-end home cinemas.

While the future looks bright for this motion technology leader, anticipated challenges include the wide range of VR experiences being experimented with and the difficulties predicting where the market will go next. From a sustainability perspective, D-BOX prefers that VR move beyond the “stunt” factor and increasingly towards a viable and larger market. Part of the equation, according to Paquette is knowledge shared across the VR ecosystem. As the market grows, so too will the need for best practices and guidelines on topics from equipment sanitation to theft and charging capacity.

Finally, Paquette acknowledges that while their clients are primarily based in Asia and LA, “it’s always a plus to be Canadian” as it sets the company apart in some respects. His hope is to see the Canadian VR ecosystem develop and thrive in the near future.