

The Campfire Union

Company Showcase

- **Type of company:** VR publishing, games and training apps
- **Established:** 2013
- **Year began working in VR:** 2013
- **Location(s):** Winnipeg, Manitoba
- **Company Size:** 1-10 Employees
- **Website:** <https://www.campfireunion.com/>

This Winnipeg-based company is among the first companies in Manitoba to work in VR. Their work spans entertainment and business applications, with their most recent product *Flipside* being a TV studio housed within a VR experience.

Company Origins

The three co-founders of The Campfire Union all worked independently on various digital projects in Manitoba before forming the company. In fact, they were part of the province's first VR project, a welding simulator, in 2013 – and were responsible to introducing VR to that project. The team then came together to work on web services and VR projects – though their 'VR moment' would soon follow.

In 2013 the founders of The Campfire Union produced a concept development – a lakeside simulation, complete with stars and trees. While the experience itself was compelling, it wasn't until they later visited a local park that the promise of VR would become clear. Indeed, the actual park sparked feelings of nostalgia with respect to the virtual experience. Seeing VR's capacity to evoke such a deep emotional connection, The Campfire Union knew this was a medium different than those that had come before.

TV Production in a VR Headset

Although The Campfire Union has created several pieces of interactive VR content (e.g., *Last Cities* a two-player strategy game based on the tabletop game of the same name), the team is also excited about the promise of *Flipside*. A "TV studio in VR", *Flipside* allows creators to make VR content without the need to program code or interact with complex games engines.

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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Though made for 3D environments, it also allows creators to produce 2D content for publishing on platforms like YouTube, Facebook or Twitch.

Once the content environment is created, actors can take on highly expressive 3D avatars and interact with audiences as they would in a live studio-based show – but in the VR environment. While on stage, a director can select between a number of virtual camera angles – again as they would in a typical television broadcast.

While there are a number of possible applications for *Flipside* its most obvious entertainment applications are for game shows, comedy programming and other instances where real time interaction between the performers and the audience is central to the experience.

Competitive Advantage

While there are some other competitors making product similar products, *Flipside*'s focus on real time interaction between the audience and performers – along with performers' ability to interact with object in the 3D environment – set the product apart. If you ever were a kid who tried to jump through the screen into TV-land, *Flipside* will satisfy that long-held urge.

Looking ahead

The *Flipside* project will be launching in a private alpha testing phase shortly, and has been included in acceleration programs like Boost VC and another VR accelerator located in Silicon Valley. At this point, the Campfire Union team is looking for partners and investors to bring the project to the next level.

The Campfire Union sees a bright future ahead for VR, especially as it evolves into AR and other forms of mixed reality. The current challenges relate primarily to the pace of hardware adoption. It's a big leap for consumers to take – given how different VR experiences are from more traditional screen-based content – but the promise and potential of VR is too huge to ignore. From social multiplayer to virtual presence interactivity, VR has the potential to be as widespread as it is transformative.

To seize that opportunity, the Campfire Union thinks to the future. If kids born today will never know a world without VR, what software may they need? The Campfire Union is seeking to answer that question – and so remain at the forefront of VR development for decades to come.