

MashUp Machine

Company Showcase

- **Type of company:** Content creation and platform
- **Established:** 2015
- **Year began working in VR:** 2015
- **Location(s):** Vancouver, BC
- **Company Size:** 6-10 Employees
- **Website:** <http://mashupmachine.io>

This Vancouver-based content creation firm is tapping into the potential of machine-learning and leveraging social user engagement to create the next-generation of interactive entertainment experiences.

Company origins

MashUp Machine's leadership team is passionate about applying technology to storytelling. The company was co-founded by film and game industry veterans Ben Cole and Christopher Sjöholm. Ben Cole is an Academy Award winning creative-technologist and was previously the North American Head of Software for MPC Film, one of the world's largest visual effects companies. Christopher Sjöholm is an award-winning director, VFX supervisor and producer previously with Rhythm & Hues, Electronic Arts and Activision. Together with their team, they are exploring the links between adaptive/machine learning technology and virtual reality to create a whole new form of entertainment.

The team at MashUp Machine recognizes that there is a dearth of content in VR. It hopes to fill the gap by enabling audiences to create and interact with the stories and storyworlds they love – like “turbo-charged” fan-fiction. As it focuses on next-generation narrative entertainment, MashUp Machine is pursuing a new kind of interactive cinematic experience, which it calls Adaptive Storyworlds, that will subtly respond to and learn from the audience as it engages with the platform, while weaving together all the stories users create into endless branching narrative.

Pursuing growth

MashUp Machine is one of the early adopters in this relatively nascent space – describing itself as in Beta mode. In this respect, the company is in experimental landscape, trying to push a new form of content and new cinematic experiences. At present, its prototype storyworld is Scary Cabin – an interactive experience that revolves around a small group of characters spending a weekend away at a cabin. This “familiar narrative domain” allows both the creators and audiences to interact in a playful way, but within the constraints of the horror genre.

As Scary Cabin grows and gains traction, MashUp Machine’s team is exploring a number of core questions, including:

- How to attract audiences to participate in collaborative content creation
- How to create tools that encourage learning and fun in the creative process
- How to make animated fiction and create compelling stories in those worlds
- How to guide and structure those experiences to enable machines to learn

For MashUp Machine, advances in smart tools and technology, “deep learning algorithms” and natural language processing all contribute to making its creative ideas come to life.

Factors for success

Community has been important to MashUp Machine’s success so far. The firm leverages its deep connections in visual effects, game development and animation to attract new partners and investors. When it comes to storytelling, the essence of MashUp Machine is to embrace collaboration and bring large groups of people together to create new content, and that starts with their team.

For both Cole and Sjöholm, a key principle of innovation in entertainment is the need to balance and understand the creative and the technical dimensions of their work. They believe that true innovation in entertainment occurs when technology and creativity intersect and inspire.

Looking ahead

Cole and Sjöholm understand that the opportunity in VR is much broader than purely entertainment content. Indeed, they are excited about eventually partnering in other verticals from health to education. Their focus for now remains building out new entertainment experiences, creating engaging content and community development. Also important for MashUp Machine: collecting and amassing the pools of data that will be attractive to VR stakeholders, but also others in the machine learning space.