

Sub-Pac VR

Company Showcase

- **Type of company:** VR hardware and/or accessories – haptic feedback devices
- **Established:** 2013
- **Year began working in VR:** 2014
- **Location(s):** Toronto, Palo Alto, San Francisco, Los Angeles, London
- **Company Size:** 11-50 Employees
- **Website:** <http://subpac.com/>

This global firm, with a head office in Toronto and other HQs in Palo Alto, San Francisco, Los Angeles and London began as a shared vision between two friends who realized that the future of music and sound would be immersive and tactile.

Company origins

In 2011, friends and musicians, Todd Chernecki and John Alexiou quit their jobs in law and banking to experiment with the very technology that forms the backbone of SubPac full-time. Working with engineers and mentors, music producers and sound designers, Chernecki and Alexiou spent three years refining the tactile audio technology that they believed would accelerate full physical immersion in VR experiences.

As a wearable audio system (in other words – a slim and stylish backpack or vest), SubPac allows the wearer to experience the subtleties of sound and music with his or her body. From a gust of wind to the feeling of someone tapping your shoulder, SubPac aims to unlock the potential of bringing the body into the experience. Today, the kit seems as appealing to gamers as is it is to DJs and music fans (it can also be embedded in the seats in theatre and cars).

Pursuing growth

As the product has taken shape, so too has the potential market developed. For now, SubPac seems to enjoy something of a first-mover advantage, having identified only a few kickstarter projects with tangentially relevant offerings. But the demand from the ecosystem is strong. For everyone from content creators to advertisers, optimizing the VR experience is a top

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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priority. And SubPac is transforming physical immersion in VR, an essential part of storytelling experiences and believability. Alexiou envisions that SubPac's product should appeal as much to those *creating* VR experiences as it does to the end users or customers of that experience. Today you can buy SubPac readily in stores around the world from the UK to Switzerland, South Korea to Chile (and Amazon of course). The backpack retails from between \$99 to \$350 USD.

Key success factors

One success factor for SubPac was its ability to be flexible. Alexiou cautions VR industry companies from trying to define a path too soon or assume too much about the landscape in case they may miss the target as the rest of the eco-system unfolds. In this context, industry knowledge and staying current on the latest developments, trends and needs has been crucial to the company's strategic thinking and resource allocation. That's not to say the company has remained cautious or risk averse. In fact, Alexiou and Chernecki recognized right away that, in addition to its Toronto office, SubPac would need to invest in physical locations in LA, San Francisco and London both to tap into key market segments and cultivate relationships with potential partners, influencers and mentors.

Looking ahead

What lies in store for SubPac? As it grows its music and screen-based business, and boasts users from Oculus, Samsung, NBC Universal, Lionsgate, Felix & Paul to Marshmallow Laser Feast - it is also pursuing exciting new verticals and applications. SubPac is exploring use cases in healthcare and accessibility (i.e., particularly for the deaf and hard of hearing community) as well as the automotive and aerospace industries.

And what of Canada's VR Landscape? According to Alexiou, Canada is usually at the forefront of innovation and VR is no exception to that trend. His thought is that the Canadian companies would benefit from greater partnerships to accelerate and amplify growth. These partnerships could be with people (e.g., experts/thought-leaders), start-up or established companies, academia or government and can be enormously beneficial during a company's early development process – particularly as the VR landscape is still uncertain and undefined. Alexiou's concern is that when it comes to VR, Canadian companies can tend to underestimate strength in numbers and the benefits of sharing knowledge.