

CTRL V

Company Showcase

- **Type of company:** VR Arcade
- **Established:** 2016
- **Location(s):** Across Canada and in the US
- **Company Size:** 25-50 Employees
- **Website:** <https://www.ctrlv.ca/>

Started in 2016, Ctrl V is North America's first VR arcade. Patrons come to one of the 15 Ctrl V virtual reality gaming hubs located across Canada and in the US to play a large selection of VR games in a welcoming, stimulating and safe environment. Ctrl V staff are committed to assisting the customer in their VR journey, whether they are experienced gamers or about to discover virtual reality for the first time.

Company Origins

In a certain way, the idea of Ctrl V started with a sad story 14 years ago. A Korean man who died after playing 56 hours of video game in a row. Ryan Brooks, founder and CEO, remembers thinking about this man who forgot his basic needs just by looking at a flat screen: what would happen when we would get to the point of VR and its compelling immersion? For Ryan, there had to be a place where people could go to regulate their immersion, and that's how the seed of Ctrl V was planted.

Prior to the Oculus and the HTC Vive being announced around 2015, the technology of VR wasn't compelling enough for Ryan to engage in this industry. The Oculus and the Vive finally offered what the public was waiting for: quality and immersion. From this moment, things went very fast for Ctrl V and its 3 founders, Ryan, Robert and James. So fast that they actually had the chance to try these VR devices only a couple of months before the opening. Ctrl V ordered 23 HTC Vive devices in March 2016, received these units on schedule in April and opened its first location in Waterloo, ON, on May 25, 2016. Ctrl V was among the very first operational VR arcade business in North America, with a couple of other US companies opening VR arcades shortly after. Ryan was even surprised of the interest for this project: in the first two months, Ryan received over 300 requests for franchising, even though he had never considered the prospect of more than one location.

Competitive Advantage

What started as a passion project for Ryan, is now a growing business. With 15 locations (in AB, MB, ON and in the US) and more to come, Ctrl V has established itself as a leading player in the VR industry. Aside from having the first-mover advantage, Ctrl V has developed a particular identity to stand out from competition. Following its mandate of bringing VR to the masses, Ctrl V has sought to create a

comfortable environment for an audience composed essentially of families and VR newcomers. Ctrl V's staff is not entirely made up of gamers but rather of a variety of relatable people looking to help patrons discover VR and enjoy their experience. As Ryan notes, a keen focus on customer service is essential for VR arcades: people are about to experience a new technology (for 80% it's their first encounter in VR) in a public setting, while they are effectively blinded. Inhibition is indeed one of the biggest obstacles, but Ryan places a great emphasis on support, comfort and affordability. Thanks to an interface developed in-house, Ctrl V was able to minimize the number of staff required on the floor (1 staff for every 8 stations), and thus to keep a competitive price point.

Another great success of Ctrl V is to have built relationships with developers. From the very beginning, Ryan and his team opted to do direct outreach to game developers. At that time there was no platform designed to distribute VR content for a commercial setting. Steam reached out to arcades and developers to create such a platform, but the final product wasn't really what the industry expected. In fact, Steam offered a per station, per game, per month high-priced licencing rate. This was not sustainable for a company such as Ctrl V, with its 60+ stations (at the time) and hundreds of available titles. Ctrl V instead opted to negotiate a per minute rate with its developer partners. Ctrl V tracks and reports monthly use time to developers, who seem to respond positively to this solution.

This ongoing relationship with developers continues with events like the "free developer day", hosted by Ctrl V at its Waterloo location. One weeknight a month, developer partners can use, free of charge, six VR stations set aside to test in-progress games, and receive feedback from customers, who come and play for free. Live plays are recorded and streamed to the developers so that they can see how people interact with their content.

Challenges

Apart from creating an appealing and reassuring environment for players of all ages, the biggest challenge facing Ctrl V, and VR arcades in general, is content piracy. Arcades are required to get a licence for each game they offer, although many arcades are infringing on this rule either because they are ignorant of this requirement or simply because they don't want to pay the cost incurred. Most VR developers are small indie studios, meaning that they can't afford to go after every arcade that illegally exploits their content.

Ryan has stories of arcades forced out of business after a few months because of competitors opening a location and not "playing by the book" and undercutting the legitimate facilities by having a lower overhead (not paying content license fees). Though there are organizations in place like the VR Standards Board, these organizations are really only able to report these infringing arcades to the developers so that they can send emails and take actions if required. Content piracy is a major issue for VR arcades, putting a strain not only on legitimate arcades but also on developers, and Ctrl V hopes for a solution to raise awareness and create a level playing field.

Looking ahead

Ryan wants Ctrl V to explore new ways to enhance immersion without any peripherals and wearables. Multidirectional treadmills are currently too expensive and not designed to fit in VR arcades, while vests, shoes and gloves require sizing and hygiene procedures. Using

these any of these peripherals would also extend the transition time between two games or two groups. But most of all, Ctrl V is committed to ensure accessibility to its VR experiences. Right now, a number of titles are playable by persons with disabilities, and Ctrl V fully intends to keep delivering accessible experiences. Other non-wearable technologies like cameras capturing the player's motions are options to conciliate accessibility and immersion.