

ADDED VALUE





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Revolutionary: MULTI/JOINT® in VR

Virtual Reality is the next big thing worldwide. Niko Verhaegen, Global Business Applications Manager for New Technologies within GF, tells us all about it...

What is VR exactly?

VR stands for virtual reality. It means you create a world that looks very much real, but does not physically exist. It can look like the real world in a mind blowing way. Think of a coral reef under water, but it can also be something completely different than the world we know today.

Within GF, which countries or departments use VR already?

GF Piping Systems is the first division which uses VR for training purposes. AR, augmented reality, has been used for GF remote support, for a while already. And at the end of the year 2019, VR was introduced as well. These VR training courses found their origin at GF Belgium, but The Netherlands and headquarters in Switzerland were soon involved. Recently, the first 'train the VR trainer' sessions were added to the program and VR modules are now used in Italy, the United States, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland.

How do we use VR within GF?

At the moment, with VR, we focus on the transfer of knowledge in combination with hands-on experience. This we do by the means of application courses while you are going through the steps to fulfil the assignment. You could think of bonding PVC in a waste water treatment plant, electrofusion welding of cooling pipes on a ship or repairing a drinking water pipe line with a DN800 MULTI/JOINT®. These are not standalone practices. At least, that is not what is intended here. It is more of an expansion of our current theoretical and practical courses. In the virtual world there is much to simulate and stimulate.

What is the goal of these courses?

The purpose of these VR courses is to eventually certify people. It is possible to do VR with more than one person at a time, but we like to focus on an individual learning curve. Everyone goes through all of the steps of the course and does this at their own pace and with their own hands.

What do you experience when doing VR?

All senses are being stimulated during a session and the 'players' level of concentration is very high. You, and only you, will have to solve the challenge... However, you are guided through text, symbols and/or a voice that is speaking to you through your headset. The experience you are gaining, is something you can bring with you to the real world. Basically, you are preparing yourself for situations that have yet to occur... A little bit like what they are doing at NASA!

Who is it meant for?

Everyone who is dealing with piping systems from GF. You can think of installers, contractors, supervisors and of course GF employees, such as sales people, marketers, R&D engineers and production workers. Last but not least, definitely all students who are following a relevant technical education.

**“There is a
100%
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Why a VR training, especially for MULTI/JOINT®?

That was actually a simple choice. The MULTI/JOINT® is a great product which is used everywhere around the world. No matter where you are or what the challenge is, it is a problem solver for repairing leakages or maintaining and creating piping systems. It is applicable in a lot of situations. When following procedure correctly, chances are small of anything going wrong. Unfortunately, in practice, we occasionally do see a human error during installation. That said, when the restraint MULTI/JOINT® DN800 was launched, it was too big to take it with you to local training courses. A VR module was a logical step and added value for everyone.

What does this MULTI/JOINT® VR module look like?

I do not want to spoil too much of course, because I would like you to try it yourself, but your job is to fix a fractured DN800 pipe. Fortunately in this training, time is not a limiting factor. You are working through the module by connecting a steel pipe and a HDPE pipe with one single restraint coupler. And as a reward, well, you have to find out.

What are the results of the MULTI/JOINT® VR course so far?

We are not 100% there yet when it comes to the structure of this course. However, the feedback from our customers was very positive, unanimously. In this virtual world, everyone works hard until the end of the module and leaves this world with a big smile.

What reaction did you get regarding this MULTI/JOINT® VR course?

In terms of reactions, there are the good feedback comments. Also, the virtual world creates completely new possibilities and supports playful learning. Everyone is motivated to complete the model and show their skills when diving in this new world. But this training should not be short of fun and so far the training has made quite a few people smile. Participating colleagues from all around the world recommend it to other colleagues. One could not imagine better advertising. There are also people who have trained themselves in the VR world and did an actual installation in the real world afterwards. They told us VR turned out to be very useful for them.



A glimpse of what awaits you when following the MULTI/JOINT® VR training course



“I am allowed to dream a little, right?”

to this, in 2023, we will focus on developing certificate modules on top of the existing training modules. However, VR can be a great asset for everyone. Think of training in what they call 'people skills'.

What do you think the future is going to look like regarding VR within GF?

I am allowed to dream a little, right? In that case, I hope that by the end of 2023, all of our training courses have an AR/VR facet and that we are able to train and certify people all over the world in the same way.

Any additional thoughts on the subject?

Virtual reality is earning its place in the world and our daily lives. Compare it to cellphones 30 years ago. Many of us were skeptical at first, thinking: "for heaven's sake, what are we able to do with this?" Well, look at us now. As we speak, chances are your cellphone is within reach.

Are interested parties able to contact you?

Of course that is possible. Find my contact information below. Who knows, you might even bump into my avatar while you are having your very first GF VR training. ■

What are the benefits of training with VR?

There are a number of benefits. One of them is that you are individually taking this path, only you. There is a 100% concentration, no distractions. Another benefit is that you are learning at your own pace and you can repeat the course until you have mastered it. You are able to practice in ideal circumstances, within a safe environment, with the best weather conditions possible. You are not 'wasting' materials and you are able to work with the newest equipment. All the while, you are learning some tips and tricks as well.

Are there any pitfalls or points for improvements?

You learn as you go. That is no different for our VR modules. The very first module was built very differently than our most recent ones. You have to have a clear view on what is useful. We made sure there is some repetition in our VR applications and we build up the level of experience towards the end. There are plenty of pitfalls, what I want to avoid is that our VR modules are considered as some kind of game or gadget. They are training courses that have deep value and can be a great addition to our current top of the bill training package.

Are there any plans to roll out VR even more? What are your plans for the future?

The next step is to roll out the GF VR Portal, so we can facilitate and follow up on our modules in a professional and efficient way. Next

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