

Digital visualisation
aids: does my
business need them?



If you're in the business of selling something intangible or creating interest about your products online, you may already be using visualisation aids to attract buyers. Visualisation aids are essential for some business but less so for others. Even if your business sells services, a visual representation of the benefit of your services can assist in improving engagement with your customers. For example, a fitness centre doesn't sell memberships, it sells results. A fit and lean body image can motivate individuals to join a club simply by the person creating a vision of the body that he or she would like to have. The mind is effectively branded with a tangible image of something the person desires to possess within the near future. The membership is the means to the end. Visualisation is a broad subject so for the purposes of this document, we'll focus on digital visualisation aids for products, with specific reference to the building and development industry. But before we do...

Visualisation Aids. They can backfire!

You want your customers to buy whatever it is you're selling. This means a change in behaviour is required for your potential customers. Preceding a change in behaviour is a change in thoughts. Furthermore, an understanding of what your customer's current thoughts are about your brand and products is critical to successful communication.

SO WHAT?

In order to develop effective visual aids, it is important that accurate information about the communication challenge be obtained in the briefing process.

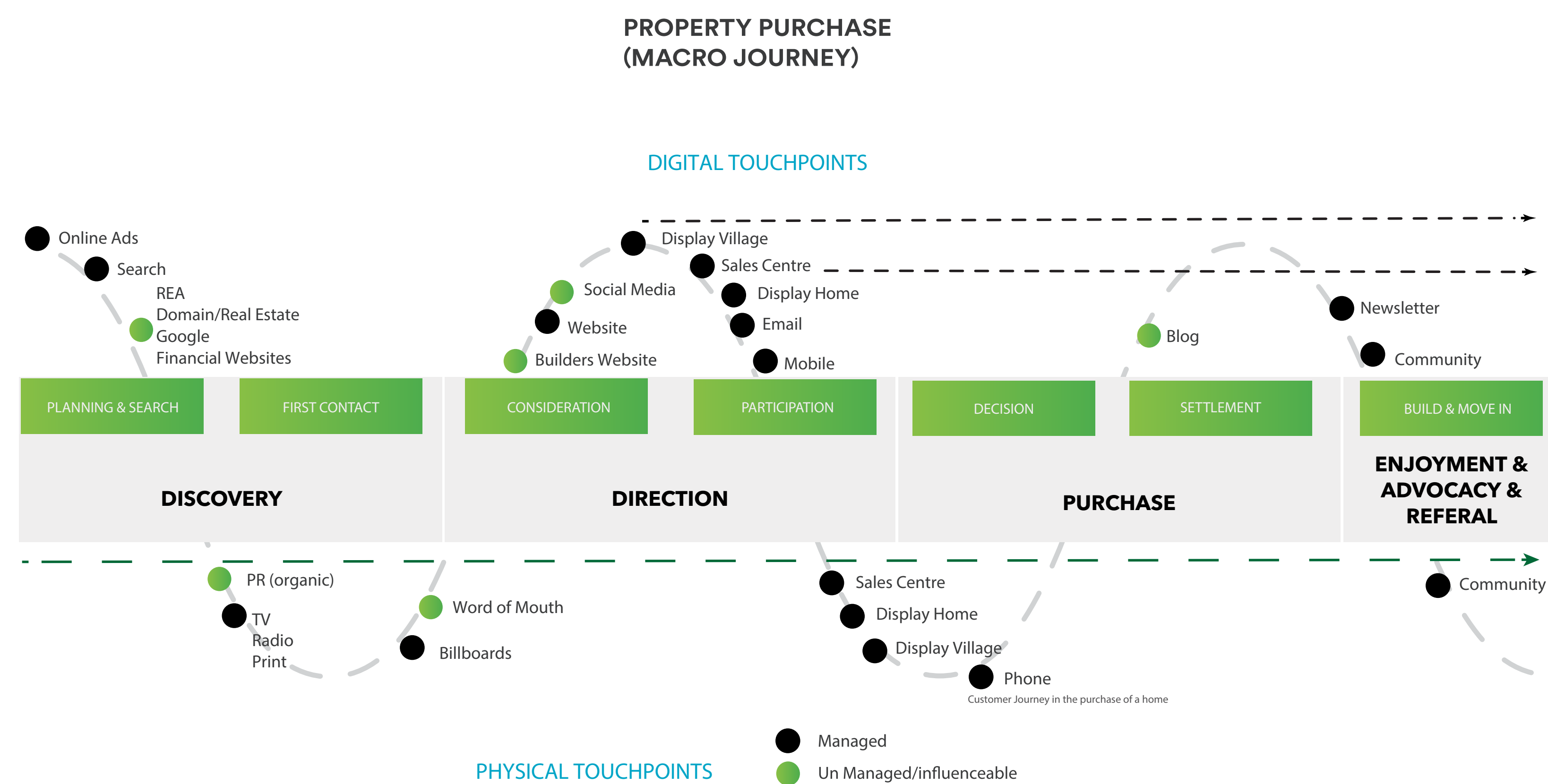
This is an interesting field of study for psychologist and research suggests that if you're asking customer's to visualise a new product in the past, then greater detail is preferred but if asked to visualise the product's use in the future, it is best depicted in more abstract or general terms. Furthermore, if your customer is familiar with your product, the effectiveness of visualising in the future is even stronger than if they are not familiar with your product. If you get this wrong, it can actually have an adverse effect on the perception of your product or brand.

Communication Challenge

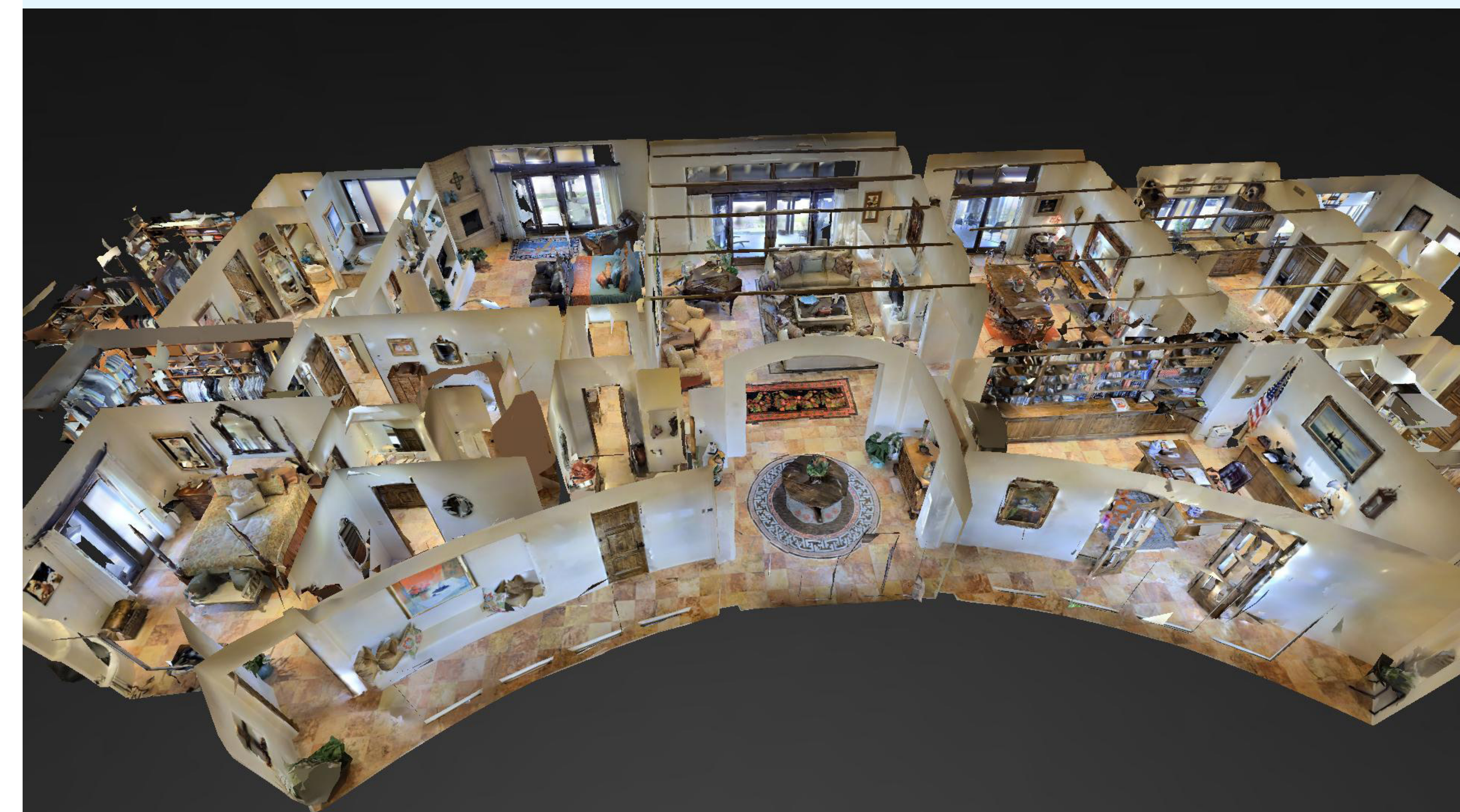
- What does your customer currently think (about your brand/product(s))?
- What do you want your customer to think (about your brand/product(s))?
- What is the customer's current behaviour (with respect to your product)?
- What is the desired customer behaviour (with respect to your product)?

The Customer Journey

There is another layer to understanding and communicating with your customers; the customer journey. The presentation of digital visualisation aids needs to be considered in the context of what information is relevant at each step of the customer journey. And this needs to factor the various touchpoints that are used to connect with your customers; the platforms that will be used to deliver the communication. Picture 2 demonstrates physical/ digital, managed/un-managed touchpoints in the typical customer journey in the purchase of a home.



Picture 2. Touch points in the customer journey for a property purchase.



Picture 3. AR tech is evolving rapidly. A flat surface trigger in picture.

Types of (digital) Visualisation Aids for your business

A visualisation aid is a representation in image or video form of something that is either yet to exist or is not conveniently accessible. It also includes the technology used to deliver it. Illustrations, rendered images and videos, 3D 360 photography delivered via AR/VR, online and interactive touchscreens are a the most popular forms of digital visualisation aids used in the building industry.

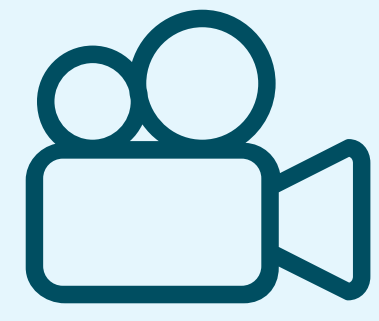
360 3D VR Tours

According to Realestate.com.au, customers spend 52% more time on properties with a VR Tour. This implies greater interest and engagement when VR tours are used in property profiles.

VR tours provide customers with a better feel for the property than still photography and gives better control than a video. It is particularly important if appealing to remote buyers but more than that, it's a way to ensure the property doesn't get overlooked in the initial online search. When customers view the tour in VR Googles (such as Samsung Gear), it's as immersive as being there.

A surprising number of people cannot visualise a home from a one-dimensional floorplan.

Products like Matterport improve visualisation from a 'birds-eye' view through features like that shown in Picture 3. It allows the user to rotate and view the home from the outside from any angle, just like looking at a miniature dolls house.



These two videos illustrate the point.

Video Render The 'realness' of a video render is critical. That's not to say CGI should be as realistic as possible. The realism should be relative to the desired positioning of the project. That may mean that '75%' real is more appropriate than life-like.

Video 1. 3D video render of a house design in Hawthorn, Victoria (by Shadow Lab)





Video 2. 3D render video of National Art Gallery, Victoria (by Shadow Lab)

VIDEO 1.

Is for a knock down and rebuild of an exclusive property in the affluent suburb of Hawthorn Victoria. The architectural visualisation piece is highly evocative and an effective way to present the artist's vision and create the 'dream' for the customer. It is promoting an idea, helping the customer visualise the possibilities without going Still renders are another effective visualisation tool that enables the artist to convey the right image for the project.

VIDEO 2.

Is something that already exists and demonstrates what is possible in terms of life-like CGI. It goes beyond what can be achieved through videography alone.

Still Renders

Images can be 2D or 3D. The right briefing process will aid in delivery of the best design, factoring variables such as the target customer (demographic, ethnographic, psychographic), price (cheap to expensive), quality positioning (budget to exclusive), etc.



Nail the Briefing Process

The most professional design is the product of a thorough brief that factors the customer, context and communication objective.

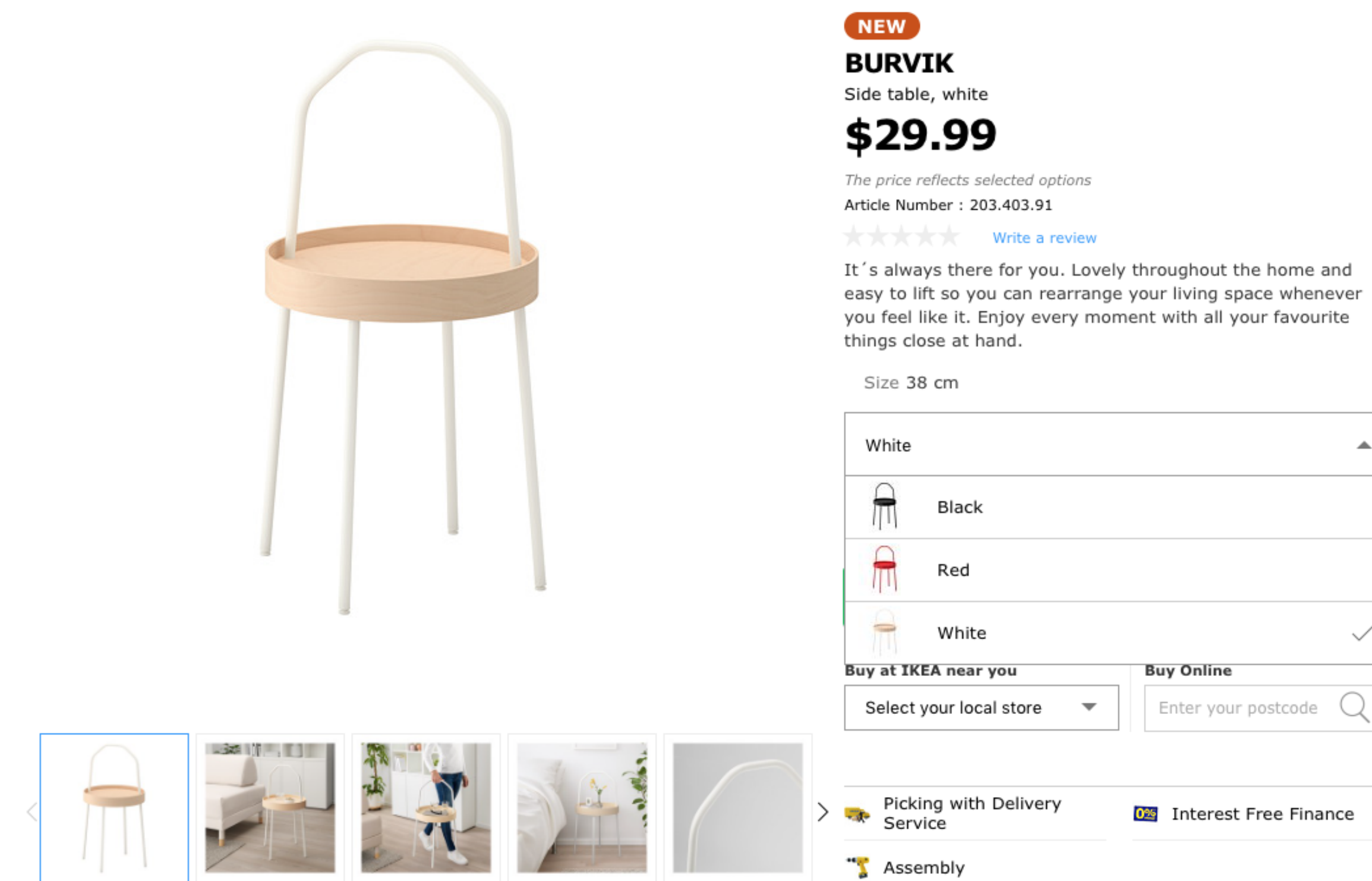
3D renders are highly effective in ecommerce.

One example of this is the experience of shopping with Ikea online. All stock items are renders.

The customer can view different options at the press of a button and see different images of it and in some instances rotate the product to see it from different angles. Ikea goes one step further allowing customer's, via an AR app, to see how the item will look in the customer's home.



Picture 4. Artist impression of the Riverside Quay retail development project (by Shadow Lab)

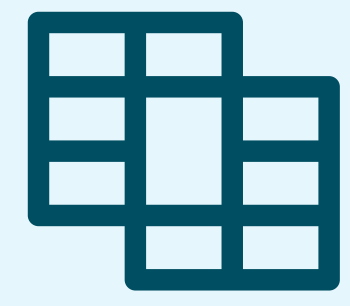


Ikea online. Retail innovators of digital visualisation aids

Augmented Reality/ Mixed Reality

Augmented reality and mixed reality can be used in many ways to help customers visualise in situ. The basic principle of AR is that a stimulus such as a particular image or object, triggers a response on a smart device such as 'play or display a particular piece of media'. AR technology is evolving rapidly. For instance, triggers can now be a flat horizontal or vertical surface (not just an object or design). This is great for looking at houses on a block or paintings on a wall respectively (see Picture 5). It's complex stuff and important to choose the right software platform.

We'll happily answer any questions you may have, so please get in touch.



Final Word: Integration is God



Picture 5. Mock up using AR to show how a home will look on a customer's block of land

If Content is King, Integration is God.

As well as considering the content and the technology at the touchpoints, designing how visualisation aids integrate with your CRM, ecommerce, POS, AV systems/ platforms is critical. Your customer's journey needs to be frictionless and the tools for guiding them through the journey while capturing meaningful data must be factored into the design.

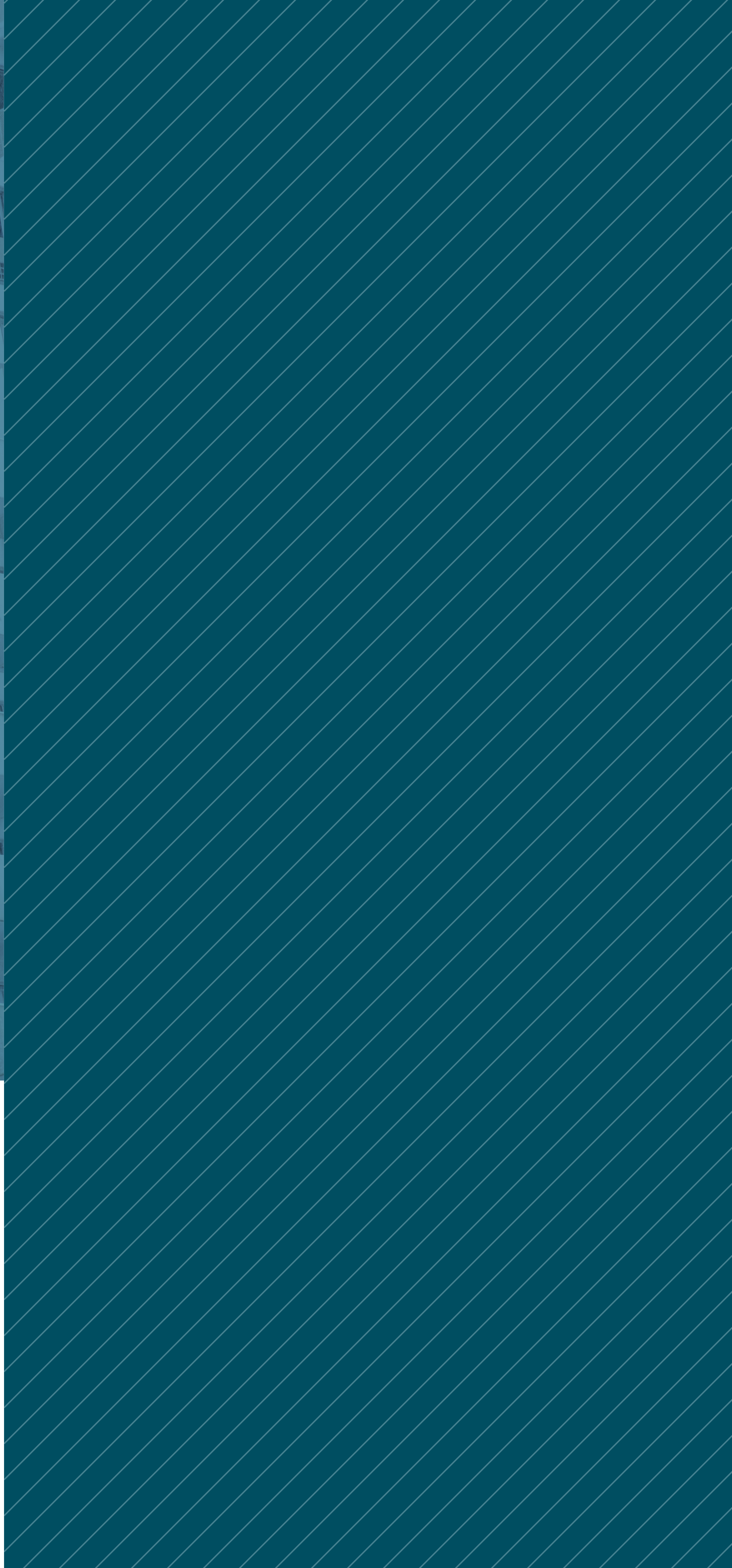
If you would like assistance with developing your communication plan or creation of content, please get in touch.

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iMin Zhao, Darren W. Dahl, and Steve Hoeffler. "Optimal Visualization Aids and Temporal Framing for New Products." Journal of Consumer Research: December 2014.



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