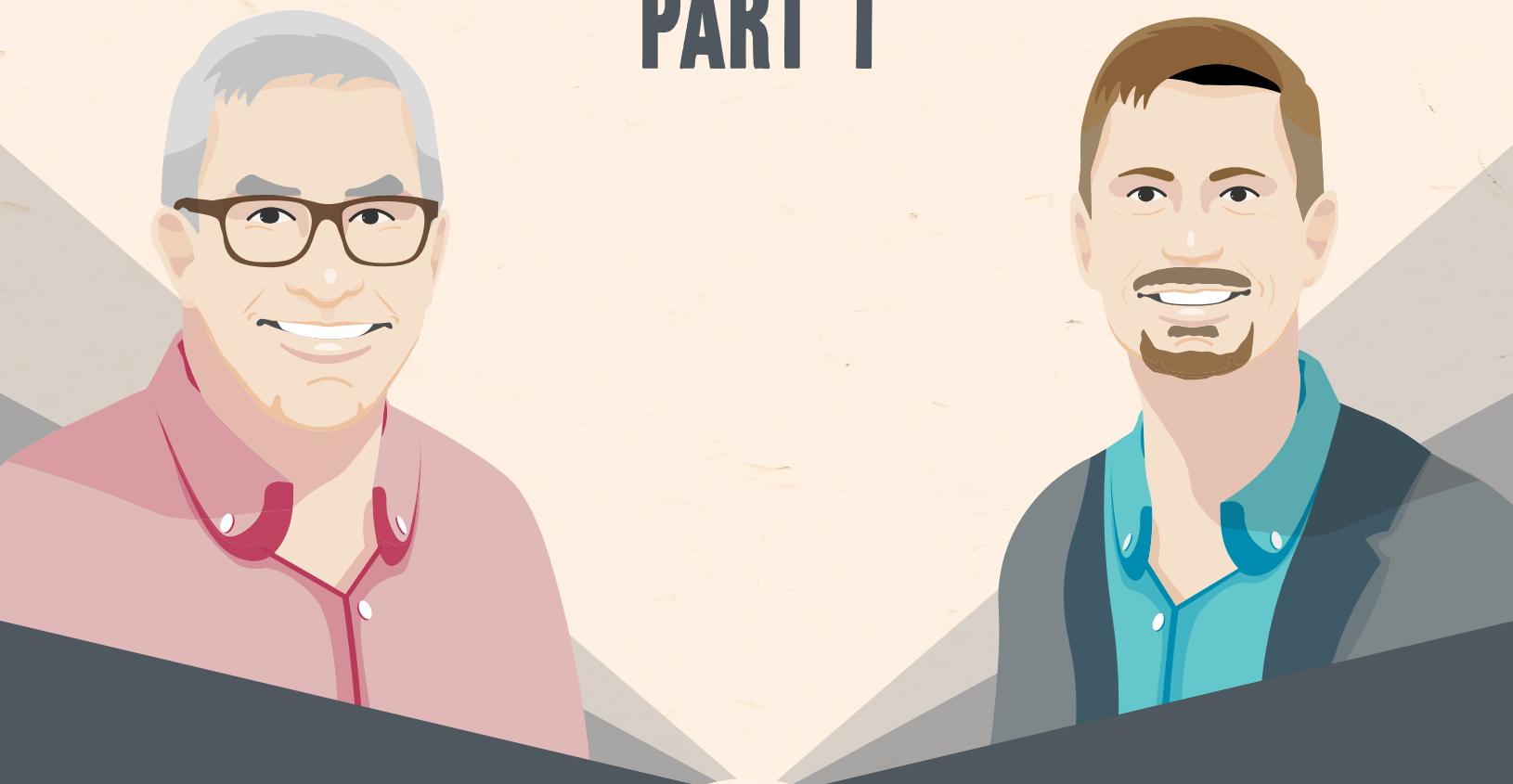


FORREC TALKS:

THE VISITOR ATTRACTION SERIES

PART 1



MATT
DAWSON

JAMES
ANDERSON



PART 1

HOW IS TECHNOLOGY A MAKE OR BREAK FACTOR IN A VISITOR ATTRACTION?

Matt Dawson, Senior Director, Visitor Attractions and James Anderson, Lead Creative Director

WELCOME TO FORREC'S TWO-PART VISITOR ATTRACTIONS SERIES, A LIGHTLY EDITED CHAT BETWEEN TWO OF OUR ENTERTAINMENT DESIGN LEADERS. IN THIS EDITION WE ASK THE QUESTION: HOW IS TECHNOLOGY A MAKE OR BREAK FACTOR IN A VISITOR ATTRACTION?

JAMES: Interesting question, but I think we need to start with what is the definition of an attraction, right?



MATT: I think as an industry we don't do ourselves a favour by just saying "attractions". The question is when is an experience good enough to be called an attraction and what role does technology play in that?



JAMES: So, if I'm going to a park and there's a roller coaster, but no theming, is that still considered an attraction? Or does it need to have a strong storyline, special effects, or significant theming for a coaster to be defined as an attraction?



MATT: It also depends globally. In the UK, they use the word attraction, or visitor attraction, to mean everything from museums – like the Tower of London, British Museum – to Longleat Safari Park. But they tend to have a kind of elevated connotation. Whereas in North America, "attraction" can imply a roadside attraction and things like that.



JAMES: It brings to mind a big ball of twine!



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MATT: What's the closest we've done to a big ball of twine?! I'm sure there's projects in Niagara Falls like that from back in the day.



JAMES: I've done an 80-foot Spiderman, so I think that comes pretty close!



MATT: Niagara Falls, home of the big ball of twine. Definition of attraction! Something you'd pull off the side the highway to see.



JAMES: Let's build one of those!



MATT: For me, attractions need technology and special effects to increase visitor expectations and the quality of the experience. That Hogwarts Express train ride at Universal for the original Hogsmeade with the whole themed land is a fantastic visitor attraction! It's amazing because it's an actual train that goes from one part to the other for what – maybe half mile, quarter mile?



JAMES: Somewhere in that range – just under a ½ mile.

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MATT: But it goes a physical distance. And you're on a train where all the windows are projection surfaces that simulate going from London to Hogsmeade, and you believe you've gone hundreds of miles.



JAMES: So, there's a perfect example a method of transportation, a train, that uses technology and story to turn it into an attraction. The multiple layers of narrative, media and special effects combine to create an experience where someone actually feels they are in the Harry Potter world.



MATT: But these days, there's nothing you can do that can last more than a few years! I remember back when Jurassic Park opened in Universal LA and that was like a big thing. Or, Back to the Future! It was a simulator ride where you felt like you were flying in that DeLorean under a dome screen and it blew people's minds.



JAMES: Now, it's old hat.



MATT: I think it's gone.



JAMES: Well, it's changed. It's now themed to The Simpsons, but the ride system is generally the same. You know, they upgraded the hardware and projection. They gave it an IP more relevant to today's guests.

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MATT: Is it the same equipment?



JAMES: It's the same type of technology, but Universal ramped up the projection resolution – to keep up with both home and movie screens – and completely overhauled the ride system.



MATT: I remember at the THEA Awards when they were talking about Universal, how back then people loved movie magic. And Universal was all about behind the scenes movie magic and that was the value. Twenty years later, kids don't care about movie magic, they really don't.



JAMES: Because they're creating their own on their phone!



MATT: Yeah, everybody's a movie maker! So, what's so special about this attraction? I can make movies.



JAMES: People want more things that put themselves into the experience.

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MATT: I don't care about Humphrey Bogart's face! I don't care about movie magic! Or even present-day stars really. It's more like "I'm the star", right? I'm a star on Instagram. I've got 400 followers. I must be a star! And that's what they want out of technology basically.



JAMES: Exactly! I want to see my face on the Magic Kingdom castle!



MATT: Technology is just trying to keep up with people's rising expectations.



JAMES: People want customization, whether it's an avatar they created or to see themselves in the attraction. So, they feel that they're part of the experience rather than just watching it. Then there's AI*, which is predicting for us what we actually want. So, even before we get to the ice cream counter or go into the attraction, it's anticipating who we are and what we actually want to see.

*Artificial Intelligence



MATT: Yes, and they're really good at doing that now.



JAMES: If you're wearing RFID wristbands, it's tracking where you're going, what you're purchasing. And if you're linked to an app, it's looking at what you're scrolling through and what you are paying attention to. So, it's really about data gathering, which is the topic *du jour* right now with Facebook. It's taking that information but then using it in a way that personalizes someone's experience.

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MATT: The data collection thing's interesting because we're working on this project in Singapore where part of the concept is to do just that. Everybody's going to have an RFID tag and it's supposed to be a customized gamified experience through a bunch of media-based environments which the client loves.

JAMES: But...



MATT: Exactly. Do we have to be careful, because there could be a backlash about data collection? Will some visitors come in and say, "You know what, I'd like to have a visitor experience where I'm anonymous, like we used to do in the old days."

JAMES: So, really, it's a balance between personalization and privacy.



UP NEXT | PART 2: IS THERE A TRICK TO KEEPING PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH THE VISITOR ATTRACTION?

QUESTIONS?

Contact Matt Dawson

Contact James Anderson



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