



CASE STUDY: FOREST TRIBE THEATRE



The Brief

Forest Tribe Theatre aim to be one of the most diverse theatres around, working closely with specialist schools across the North West, Forest Tribe Theatre offers children a truly immersive experience through educational lessons and specialist performances, following the National Curriculum.

The theatre is passionate to ensure children with additional needs are given a safe place to freely connect on a creative level with creative shows being performed at hospitals, hospices, educational environments, and libraries.

Shows and activities are created and developed for those with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Visually Impaired, ensuring their work is as inclusive as possible.

Forest Tribe Theatre are even innovative when minimising their carbon footprint, using only sustainable materials for stage designs and costumes, in addition, to carefully selecting vehicles for minimising their environmental impact whilst touring.



The Approach

Forest Tribe Theatre is constantly looking for new ways for adopting new technologies to enhance their creativity and ensure performances are engaging and enriching for all audiences.

Theatre CEO Debbie Bandara has a background in artificial intelligence (AI), qualifications surrounding virtual reality (VR) and has even been recognised with the "CEO Award" from Digital Catapult in 2021.

The theatre company approached the Virtual Engineering Centre (VEC) to explore which technologies would best match their objectives for capturing key data and audience awareness levels for helping to further tailor shows, to enhance performances and add value provided.

The VEC suggested Haptic tools for increasing the interactivity of shows and AI technology for capturing information for identifying the more engaging parts of the shows.

A Haptic platform will immerse audiences within shows, offering a sensory experience, whilst capturing data on audience movement. These haptic devices can also be created to best suit all children and audience needs,

based on differing physical abilities including mobility, ensuring these are as comfortable as possible and easy to use.

AI technology can track eye movement, informing the show directors which areas of the stage and sections of the narrative gained the greatest audience attention, including how long eye movement was held for. This movement tracking data can be collected through non-intrusive devices that will not obstruct the performance, ensuring the data is as realistic as possible.

The Virtual Engineering Centre joined Debbie Bandara at Springfield School in Crewe where the teams were able to test and collect valuable data that will help the next phase of the project including developing the platform for immersive technology. The devices were given to children who responded very positively to the performances and the technology itself, giving Forest Tribe Theatre further confidence in the devices moving forward whilst understanding the types of data that can be collated.



The Benefits

The tested proofs of concepts can now be used for a new show, 'Evolve' which the theatre is hoping to launch in 2023, with the potential of touring around London for supporting even more children across the UK.

Forest Tribe Theatre is hoping to implement this method for data gathering into other areas of their support beyond performance theatre including healthcare, artistic and educational environments, ensuring we are communicating as effectively as possible whilst also improving our learning.

The VEC also supported the Forest Tribe Theatre in testing 5G networks which they hope to use within their shows for

enhanced connectivity and use of additional technology in the future. The testing used the proof of concepts within the VEC facilities in Daresbury and theatre facilities within Crewe. In addition to this, the VEC has also introduced Forest Tribe Theatre to a network of partners and funding opportunities for additional support and additional project development.

"The support from the Virtual Engineering Centre has been fantastic and so easy. We explained what we do and wanted to achieve, and the team were enthusiastic to get started and help."

The new technologies we have been able to implement to our shows will help us to further improve our offering, help to generate new roles within the company and improve on how we connect and engage with our young audiences, as we continue our innovative and develop our creative journeys together."



– Debbie Bandara
Forest Tribe Theatre