

Down to Business English

106 - Virtual Reality: for business and play

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From Tokyo Japan and Abu Dhabi, UAE. This is Down to Business English.

Business News to improve your Business English.

*With your hosts **Skip Montreux and Dez Morgan.***

Skip: Hello everyone, welcome to Down to Business English, the podcast that helps you improve your business English through real world news.

Dez: Yes, welcome back to another episode about the harsh realities of business, economics, technology and commerce in 2017.

Skip: Huh. Dez, what is the opposite of uplifting?

Dez: You mean what is the opposite of something that makes you feel more positive and happy? I don't know, depressing? Why do you ask?

Skip: Oh, I was just thinking that that is how you are sounding today, a little of depressed. The opposite of uplifting.

Dez: Really. I guess I am just weighed down by reality at the moment. You know bills to pay, it's a long time till my next holiday, and it's already beginning to get hotter here in the UAE this year.

Skip: If you don't like your reality then what you need Dez is a little virtual reality. Picture yourself Dez climbing into the cockpit of your X-wing fighter. You looking behind yourself and there's your old friend R2-D2 ready to help.

Dez: Star Wars? You want me to watch Star Wars again?

Skip: No, I'm not talking about watching the movie. Imagine you are actually there surrounded by open space. Look, look over there! It's your wingman, flying beside you. And up ahead... that looks like the enemy. Quick Dez, buckle up that seat belt. Let's go and show them what...

Dez: I think I get the idea, Skip. So is our story today is Star Wars. The podcast fights back?

Skip: No Dez. Today we are going to be reporting on the growing applications of virtual reality.

Dez: I see. So let's do it, let's get D2B...Down to Business with Virtual Reality or VR. What is it? How does it work? And what are its multitude of uses?

Skip: So Dez. What is your basic concept of VR?

Dez: It's computer games Skip, but instead of watching the game on a screen you wear a headset or goggles instead.

Skip: I think that would be many people's perception but it is so much more than that. But since you mentioned computer games let's start there with the gaming industry.

Dez: They are always on **the cutting edge of** the latest technology.

Skip: They sure are and the high tech headset that has been in the news the most has been the Oculus Rift developed by Oculus VR.

Dez: Hey, isn't that the company that Facebook bought back in 2014?

Skip: That's correct, Facebook did acquire Oculus VR in March of 2014 for a price tag of \$2 billion. However it was also in the news from even before that acquisition. Oculus first made headlines when they raised their financing through a Kickstarter campaign in 2012.

Dez: Kickstarter, in case you haven't heard of it, is a popular crowdfunding site where companies or individuals can raise capital to pay for their new invention or venture. You know what Skip?

I don't think we've ever done a show on crowdfunding.

Skip: That would be a very good topic for a later episode. But getting back to the Oculus Rift, like many of the VR headsets it uses sensors built into it and a virtual reality camera to detect movement.

Dez: Ah, so I just need a headset then and I will be **all set?**

Skip: No quite. You will also need a pretty high end gaming PC, with at least 16 gigabytes of RAM and a fast processor, or chip, and a graphics card.

Dez: Oh, this is beginning to sound expensive.

Skip: Then you need the Oculus Touch game controller as well. So that's \$600 for the headset, \$200 for the controller and a couple of thousand for the PC. And did you want any games with that too?

Dez: Close to \$3000 and I haven't got any games? Yeah you know, I think I will pass on the Oculus.

Skip: Your loss. I said that Oculus was newsworthy and it has also been in the news recently when it lost a lawsuit to a smaller development company ZeniMax, who claimed that Oculus stole trade secrets. Oculus has been ordered to pay \$500 million which is still a lot less than the 4 billion that Zenimax was asking for.

Dez: Interesting but can I get into VR gaming for a bit less than \$3000?

Skip: Well, the Taiwanese handset maker; HTC also has a headset, the Vive. What is interesting about the Vive is it uses a range of sensors mounted on the walls of the room. This means that the wearer has full freedom to walk around if the game or application demands it.

Dez: Hey, that sounds pretty cool. The whole room becomes a VR environment. Hang on a minute and that is available for less than the 3000 odd dollars needed to set up an Oculus?

Skip: Sorry Dez you old cheapskate. You said available for less, didn't you? Hmmm, well the

Vive is more expensive at \$800 for the headset. Same price really for a high end gaming computer. Plus it would be a bit more for the controllers and so you should take those into account as well. But do keep in mind that the Oculus Rift and the Vive are premium experiences. There are other, less expensive VR options however.

Dez: Hey, I'm pleased to hear that. And what would they be?

Skip: The Playstation VR, which uses similar motion tracking technology as the Vive, is a lot cheaper. They go for around \$400.

Dez: \$400?! Hey, I might be able to **spring for** that.

Skip: Well hang on there Dez. You have to add in the cost of the Playstation 4 console, which starts at around \$300. And the motion controllers for another \$100 so in total you're looking at about 800 bucks. The screen resolution is not up to the standard set by the Rift and the Vive, but the Sony option is definitely a lot more affordable.

Dez: \$800? Well maybe if I save up.

Skip: But you have a Samsung mobile phone, don't you?

Dez: Hey, just bought a new one. Don't they have a VR headset that you can slot the phone into?

Skip: I was just going to say that the mobile phone based options, from Samsung and Google, would be the next level down in price, and of the quality of the experience.

Dez: I know the Samsung Gear is available here in Abu Dhabi for around \$100 and I hear that you can get a controller for that too.

Skip: If you had one of the new Google Pixel handsets, then Google has a similarly priced option as well. But seeing as you already have a Samsung Galaxy the Samsung Gear is probably your best bet to give VR a try.

Dez: Virtual reality here I come then.

Skip: Hmm. Now, if we can get away from the gaming applications for a moment.

Dez: Aww. Do we have to?

- Skip: Yes, we really do. Virtual reality has many applications other than gaming. But the important ones that I want to talk about are in the medical, construction, education and business fields.
- Dez: Medicine?
- Skip: Think about it Dez. Virtual Reality can create a three dimensional model of a patient's body using data from CAT scans and ultrasounds. This 3D model can then be used for surgeons to look at a tumor and practice different procedures to see which is the best approach for that specific patient and that particular condition.
- Dez: Wow, that does sounds like a really valuable use.
- Skip: And beyond surgery, VR has a wide range of uses in rehabilitation. There's a company called MindMazeto that has created an immersive therapy program for stroke victims to help them regain motor and cognitive functions faster than with traditional therapy.
- Dez: You know now that you mention it, a friend of mine used that type of therapy and he looks and sounds a lot better than he did after his seizure.
- Skip: That's great to hear. The construction industry too is also investing pretty heavily in virtual reality. In the early stages of a construction project, architects and engineers can move around a structure checking the **viability** of the design. Then in later stages, clients can look around at a virtual building to highlight any parts of the design that they may wish to change before the construction is complete.
- Dez: That sounds very helpful. It's quite common for people who have extensions built on their homes to wish they had thought through their blueprints more carefully before the construction was complete.
- Skip: Obviously, and VR is a great tool in this kind of application. Now to education which is more our field Dez.
- Dez: Hey, sure is. There was a presentation at my college last year that illustrated uses of VR in education. The applications that were discussed were mostly for the engineering departments but some of them were mind blowing. They showed aviation students taking a virtual jet engine apart for maintenance.
- Skip: Nice. Of course flight simulators have been with us for some time but imagine how much more valuable the experience would be using a VR cockpit. In the automotive field, Toyota is currently using the Oculus headset to teach young drivers about driving with all the distractions that exist on modern roads.
- Dez: That is all very interesting, but as this is a business podcast....
- Skip: I'm getting there. Think of this business use of VR Dez. Executives can close their office door and tee up on the 18th hole at Augusta or maybe the 15th at Gleneagles.
- Dez: Golf? Are you telling me that the only use of VR in business is for executives to brush up on their golf skills?
- Skip: I'm only joking Dez – but golf is a big part of the corporate world.
- Dez: Yeah, I suppose.
- Skip: But seriously, probably the biggest use so far in business is that businesses can model their new product ideas without having to build multiple prototypes. They can then test them using these VR models to decide which design is best. This is particularly useful if the product or the real world testing of it is potentially harmful or dangerous in some way.
- Dez: Crash testing of new car models?
- Skip: That's a good example. Another use is a company can present and analyze data in ways that are far more visually descriptive than the old pie or bar charts.
- Dez: It sounds like the uses for virtual reality are limitless. And with the continuous development

of technology it could very well end up being used in thousands of different applications.

Skip: True, we have barely **scratched the surface** of this topic. Who knows, within a few years you and I could be podcasting together in a virtual studio.

Dez: Wouldn't that be something – I look forward to that.

Skip: But until that day comes, I think for now it is time for you and I to get D2V...Down to Vocabulary.

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Dez: I will start off vocabulary today with the adjective phrase to be on **the cutting edge**, which means to be in the most advanced position. Literally, it means to be at the cutting point of a knife but is generally used to talk about the use of a new technology or procedure. In the story I commented that the gaming industry is generally on **the cutting edge of** new computer technology.

Skip: I used to think that Apple was on **the cutting edge of** personal computing, but as the latest MacBook doesn't really do much more than the older models, I am not so sure about that anymore. But do you know where you can definitely see **cutting edge** technology?

Dez: No, where would that be?

Skip: The annual Consumer Electronics Show, or CES, which is held every January in Las Vegas.

Dez: That is always an exciting event and this year's CES was the first time that major Japanese car companies like Toyota and Nissan attended. I heard that they showed off some awesome **cutting edge** futuristic cars.

Skip: They did indeed. But moving on, I want to talk about the two part adjective '**all set**'. When you say that you are '**all set**' or that something is '**all set**', you are communicating that everything is in place and ready to start. In the story Dez wanted to know if he bought a VR headset

would he be **all set** to play virtual reality games.

Dez: Yes, and you disappointed me by explaining all of the other hardware that I would need to buy before I could even get started.

Skip: Sorry, I just wanted you to be well informed.

Dez: Yeah well, thanks for that. Well, a further example using '**all set**' would be if you had a big project at work. Before you begin, you might first collect all the data, then open all of the relevant documents on your computer, and then you'd be **all set** to begin.

Skip: I often get **all set** to edit an episode of D2B and then get distracted by my Twitter or Facebook feed.

Dez: Yeah, I can't multitask either, at least not when I need to concentrate.

Skip: Multitasking is so overrated.

Dez: Now I would like to talk about the phrasal verb '**to spring for**', which means to be willing to spend money on something. In the story I say that I might be able to **spring for** a Playstation VR system as it's a lot more affordable than some of the other options.

Skip: To **spring for** is often used to describe a purchase that is either quite large or one you are a little reluctant to make. For example, I have been trying to convince my boss to **spring for** better computers and larger monitors in the office but as of yet, I have been unsuccessful.

Dez: Stick with it. You just need to convince him that the expenditure will bring improvements to everyone's work.

Skip: I will. Next we have the noun **viability**. **Viability** refers to the likelihood of something succeeding as intended. In the story I talked about how engineers and architects can more readily check the **viability** of a design using VR. In other words, they were using virtual reality to assess how likely it was for their design to work well.

Dez: Before putting a new idea into practice companies often complete a '**viability** study' to see whether the plan is possible. Skip, do you remember when the Japanese Government had a plan to move many government departments

out of Tokyo to stimulate the economy outside of the city?

Skip: That was a long time ago, but yes I do remember it. It used to be a very hot topic, but now you rarely hear about it.

Dez: Well apparently the **viability** study was not very favorable and the government has shelved the plans for the time being.

Skip: I bet being awarded the upcoming 2020 Olympics had something to do with it as well.

Dez: Ahh, perhaps. I will finish up today with a final phrasal verb to **scratch the surface**.

Skip: Does that mean to drop your Microsoft Surface tablet and leave a big scratch on it?

Dez: No, that is not what it means. In fact it means to just begin talking about something, or examining a very large topic. In the story Skip says that he and I had barely **scratched the surface** of the topic of VR and its many uses.

Skip: I like to think that I know quite a lot about the use of technology in education but when I meet some really knowledgeable people I realize that I have barely **scratched the surface**.

Dez: I don't know about that Skip. You're always telling me about **cutting edge** education technology that I haven't heard about yet.

Skip: Well I read a lot but I don't have that much hands on experience with a lot of it. If I only had time to go back to school for six months, I think I would be **all set**.

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Dez: Well thank you for that report on the virtual reality industry Skip. It may not have cheered me up as much as you'd hoped, but it did take my mind off of...well reality for a while at least.

Skip: Well I'm happy it cheered you up momentarily. Just before we go today I want to take a moment and give a big thank you to everyone

who has signed up and become a D2B member. We sincerely appreciate your support.

Dez: Yes, thank you very much. Your membership goes a long way and we really do appreciate it.

Skip: And if you are not a member yet and you get value from this podcast – please do consider signing up for one of our membership plans. Just visit downtobusinessenglish.com and check out the Membership page for details.

Dez: Remember, all members get unlimited access to the entire library of D2B audio scripts and can sign up to get automatic delivery of audio scripts for future episodes.

Skip: Thanks everyone. See you next time.

Dez: Bye bye

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