

Failing to Succeed

Q: What do Crystal clear soda by Pepsi, green Ketchup, and a Donald Trump board game have in common?

A: They are all represented in the Swedish “Museum of Failure”, in Helsingborg.



Set up by a clinical psychologist, this parade of well-intentioned (but ultimately flawed) concepts now includes the addition of Google Glass – the pioneering heads-up display technology that we at HRW have previously tested and assessed for application in the healthcare MR space.

Now, whilst it did make us rather sad to see this innovative piece of technology placed alongside the likes of Bic “for her” pens and Sony Betamax, this has also got us thinking about what it means to try and fail when developing something new.

As Steve Job’s once said: “Embrace every failure. Own it, learn from it, and take full responsibility for making sure that next time, things will turn out differently”. Whilst it’s difficult to digest wisdom about failure from one as wildly successful and influential as Jobs, he does make a good point – and let’s not forget that on the way to driving the world-changing successes of the iPhone, iPod, and Macbook, Apple did litter a number of failures behind them (the Apple III, the Apple Newton, the Twentieth Anniversary Macintosh, and the ROKR to name a few).

And this does seem to be something of a pattern when considering innovative genius. Care to guess how many versions of James Dyson’s revolutionary vacuum cleaner were created before he developed the one that worked? More than five thousand. Dyson has recently spoken about using failure to drive success, and we certainly agree with this principle.

At HRW, we regularly state that whilst new methods and tools are exciting, it is essential not to become carried away by the new and the shiny, but instead to rigorously assess the potential of new innovations. With Google Glass, we can support the key driver of their submission to the Museum – the bugs, which were numerous and driven by early launch of the prototype, really did make the glasses difficult and sometimes counter-intuitive to use.

However, we thoroughly enjoyed playing with this technology, and managed to run some great self-funded research into its potential: capturing some wonderful physicians-eye footage along the way which did truly bring their experience to life.

It is clear that Google will continue to innovate: learning from this failure and using it to further advance this type of technology. When a member of Google’s Innovation team spoke to HRW at our company day, it is clear that a great deal of ideas are cooking behind closed doors: from Virtual Reality “paint” technology and software for designers and engineers, to holistic wireless sensors for ongoing monitoring and information capture.

Google and Alphabet will not let this particular failure stop them, and we’re pleased to say that neither will we: we continue to take pride in our position as industry leaders when it comes to the testing and adoption of new innovations, and will continue to do so: see our recent assessment of new sensor technology for adherence monitoring, and self-funded assessment of Virtual Reality for stimulus testing.

And whilst some of the ideas we test and critique may turn out to be the Harley-Davidson perfume of MR techniques, we know that to find the golden nuggets that really can make a difference to our work can be just around the corner – past a couple of lobotomy hammers and some fat-free Pringles.

Cathy Haw – Associate Director
Healthcare Research Worldwide

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