



Nissan goes virtual with the Sakura

A look at the company's exploration of the metaverse

August 10, 2022

Our relationship with cars has many entry points. How we discover and relate to vehicles in our day-to-day lives and the memories we create with them are unique for each person. Maybe it was your first driving lesson from a parent, or in the case of Nissan's CEO, the sports cars featured in a comic book he read as a kid. Nissan is now looking to the future to create new memories—in new ways—with its cars. This time, it's in the virtual world.

One of the champions of Nissan's entry into the virtual came from within. Haruna Ugai works in PR and has always been curious about the ways the company can explore the metaverse, a shared virtual space in which users interact with other users. In early 2021, an influencer she had previously worked with told her about a platform called VRChat*1. This sparked her interest and she helped get the Nissan brand promoted at a virtual exhibition on the platform. Ugai says, "We all knew we wanted to do something with VR, but we just didn't know what. When the chance to participate in the VR exhibition came up, we knew it was the right choice."

The exhibition was just a starting point for Nissan's foray into VR. The user information gathered from the event gave Nissan the confidence to create a virtual version of its Nissan Crossing brand-experience space in November 2021, and plan the eventual unveiling of a new vehicle on the platform. "We didn't want to just jump on the VR bandwagon, so to

speak. We made sure to take the time needed to plan exactly how we would introduce ourselves to the world in the VR space.”

The right moment arrived on May 20, 2022. Nissan coincided the real world release of its Japan-market all-electric minivehicle, the Nissan Sakura, with an unveiling in the metaverse. Nissan also created a special world called Nissan Sakura Driving Island for VRChat users all over the world to virtually test drive and even charge the EV. The virtual minivehicle was created based on real world data, so its features give a surprisingly accurate representation and feel.

Driving isn't the only thing you can do on the island. It's a special place with special Japan-themed elements. Users can explore the island in the four seasons that reflect the four colors the Sakura comes in, drink Japanese tea and eat dango (a special Japanese sweet made from rice dumplings). Ugai adds, “There are other seasonally themed easter eggs hidden in the world. See if you can find them!”

Some may think the graphics of the VR world are relatively simple. However, Ugai says this was intentional. “We could have displayed the VR vehicle in a higher resolution. But that requires a higher-quality PC, which not everyone has. We wanted to make the experience accessible to as many people as possible. Just like what we aim for with our physical products.” Ultimately, it's about connection. “We aimed to create an experience where people can connect with not only with the Sakura, but also with each other,” says Ugai.

Nissan Sakura Driving Island has so far been visited by 13,000 users*2. “Many users are telling us just how surprised they are by the overall quality of the experience. So much so that one customer decided to purchase an actual Sakura after only test driving it virtually! I hope I can meet them one day, in real life.” Ugai pauses and smiles, “Or the virtual of course.”

VR gives Nissan an opportunity to connect with new audiences like never before. We're excited about what's next, and will keep innovating new digital approaches for our products.

Search for “Nissan Crossing” or “Nissan Sakura Driving Island” on the VRChat world search to find the virtual gallery and the test drive experience.

*1 Social VR platform operated by VRChat Inc.

*2 As of the end of July 2022