# Library adds lustre
to QUT's reputation as a tech-leader

Queensland University of Technology Library supplies IT devices so users can create, play and learn writes ELLEN THOMPSON.

Unlike public libraries, university libraries are not usually associated with collections of realia. However, the Queensland University of Technology Library has an established, if modest, history of making 'things' available to its user community. For example, our curriculum collection loans objects such as toys, musical instruments and Bee-Bots and our health collection includes anatomical models such as the Denoyer-Geppert giant five-part model eyeball. Recently we have started to invest in Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and 360° video technologies – blurring the line between traditional realia collection development and IT infrastructure.

In recent years, many university libraries in Australia and internationally have been experimenting with and embracing VR, AR, and 360° content, and offering access to
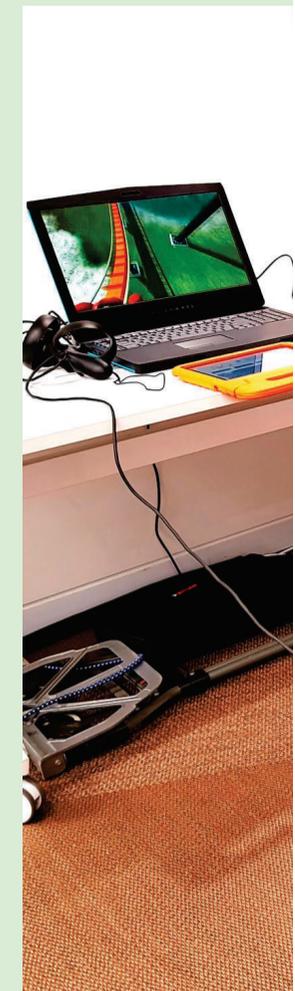
equipment and experiences. North Carolina State University, McGill University, and California State Library are renowned internationally for these kinds of services. Closer to home, there are makerspaces in the University of Wollongong, Edith Cowan University, and RMIT University, just to name a few.

As stated in its Blueprint, Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) principles include: 'to optimise opportunities provided by technology. We ensure that technology pervades the University's education and research agendas, leveraging and optimising opportunities provided by digital technologies as these evolve.' At QUT, access to AR and VR equipment, both high-end and low-fi, is not available across the breadth of the university community. Outside of specialist labs or designated degree programs and units, the majority of QUT students and staff do not have ready access to this increasingly ubiquitous technology.

The higher-end equipment, while coming down in cost, is still out of the reach of many faculty budgets, let alone individual students. The various technologies are still developing and diversifying, and it is important for the QUT community to be able to access a 'showroom' type experience in order to explore, experiment with and compare platforms, headsets and content.

Academic staff who are pioneering the use of AR, VR, and 360° content in their teaching need ready access to class sets of equipment which are well managed, maintained and bookable. QUT Library sees an opportunity to respond to the Blueprint and remove some of these barriers, enhancing QUT's reputation as a technological

All of these activities were possible solely because the library holds the equipment and makes it available to the general QUT community and has the ability to buy content on demand as need arises.

It's early days yet for these initiatives, and there are many logistical and procedural challenges to respond to. However, momentum is growing. Word of mouth is generating interest in the equipment, and early adopters amongst staff and students alike are influencing their peers to engage with VR, AR, and 360° content. As the technologies evolve and mature, QUT Library will continue to add to its 'library of things' to ensure that anyone and everyone at QUT has the opportunity to 'have a go' – and to experience, explore, and implement these emerging technologies.

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university with a real-world brand identity. The library brings to the table its buying power, service ethos, collection management expertise and, importantly, its commitment to providing equitable access to resources.

QUT Library does not have a makerspace, so its activity is centred around particular pieces of equipment with a focus on unmediated, unconditional access. The equipment currently available includes: class sets of Voxkin headsets; class sets of Merge headsets; class sets of Merge Cubes – three-dimensional AR objects; a PlayStation VR headset and console; and Oculus Rift and Touch Controllers, running on an Alienware gaming laptop. To purchase content the library also manages PlayStation and Xbox accounts, an Oculus account, and a Steam account.

There have been a wide range of activities in the last 15 months which have made use of the library's equipment. These include: university visits for grade 10 and 11 school students who experience QUT as a place of cutting-edge technology; STEM student teachers exploring and comparing VR and AR technologies for application in the classroom and to experience the tech that children are growing up with; developing scanned AR content to enable paramedic students to experience a birth situation via the Merge Cube; animation students testing their VR animated film; a 360° tour of an off-site biofuels plant, delivered in-class to Science and Engineering Students using the class set of VR headsets; a 360° experience of theatre bump-in and industry showcase event via the Oculus Rift; and a pop-up VR experience for the public at Robotronica 2017 using PlayStation VR.