HORSE RACING IN
VIRTUAL REALITY

Eye Live (client) is a media production house that focuses on 360 video compositions. In an effort to explore new opportunities in their services, they developed a concept to bring horse racing to consumers remotely and also to ones onsite and provide an experience they've never seen before: watching the race from a rider's point of view. This new adaptation of the sport over to virtual technology is intended to immerse spectators and boost engagement through betting, spectating and participating in the community, all done remotely through the digital features available through the virtual reality app.

OBJECTIVE

With a small budget allocated to this project, we were asked to create a portable virtual reality experience that allows patrons of horse racing to experience events remotely in virtual reality and continue to participate through **real-time betting**, **player tracking** and **immersive 360 video streaming** through any commercially available mobile device.

Process - Overview

This project was straightforward to a certain degree, however, the client had three main constraints:

- Highly modest budget
- Rapid turnaround, inclusive of design, UX, testing, development and release
- Minimum viable product quality production in order to successfully showcase it live at an industry conference

While this scenario is not too uncommon in terms of client requests, it was especially unique and challenging given we were working with a relatively new technology medium, distinct development parameters and limited resources.

As design leads, our role involved content gathering and developing interaction design elements, establishing visual design direction and overall project management.

Process - Discovery

Based on the original premise of remotely experiencing horse racing in 360 degrees, we conducted a Landscape Review and looked at a variety of existing apps, development platforms and presentation styles to set the baseline for the new design. Our main takeaway was despite how new virtual reality still is to a majority of users, the same visual cues are still effective and after a warm up period most people are comfortable using a VR interface, with proper design and considerations made.

We identified a visual style that users would find easy to use but would also take advantage of the extra real estate while keeping it tight and clean to maximize presentation. We built user profiles and decided to focus on our enthusiast user group based on a few key constraints we were given.

Process - Design

After the project and client handoff, we performed a deeper analysis on the client's needs and timeline to better understand what they were after. With a better scope in mind, we were able to use our background knowledge as well as some research I had done into industry tools, development processes and scalability of existing platforms to make a recommendation to the design & development plan that would **incur just 66% of the originally estimated project cost and still execute to completion within the requested timeline.**

Process - Design

We wanted to get users acquainted with the virtual reality-style navigation while not asking them to perform too much to generate meaningful interactions and results. Hence, a simple interface with all the elements clearly defined and equally accessible. By contrasting colours and sizes, we prioritized key action items, enabling users to quickly find what they need. By combining our design vision with our development plan, we were able to realize our intended design with a much reduced turnaround and fewer revisions.
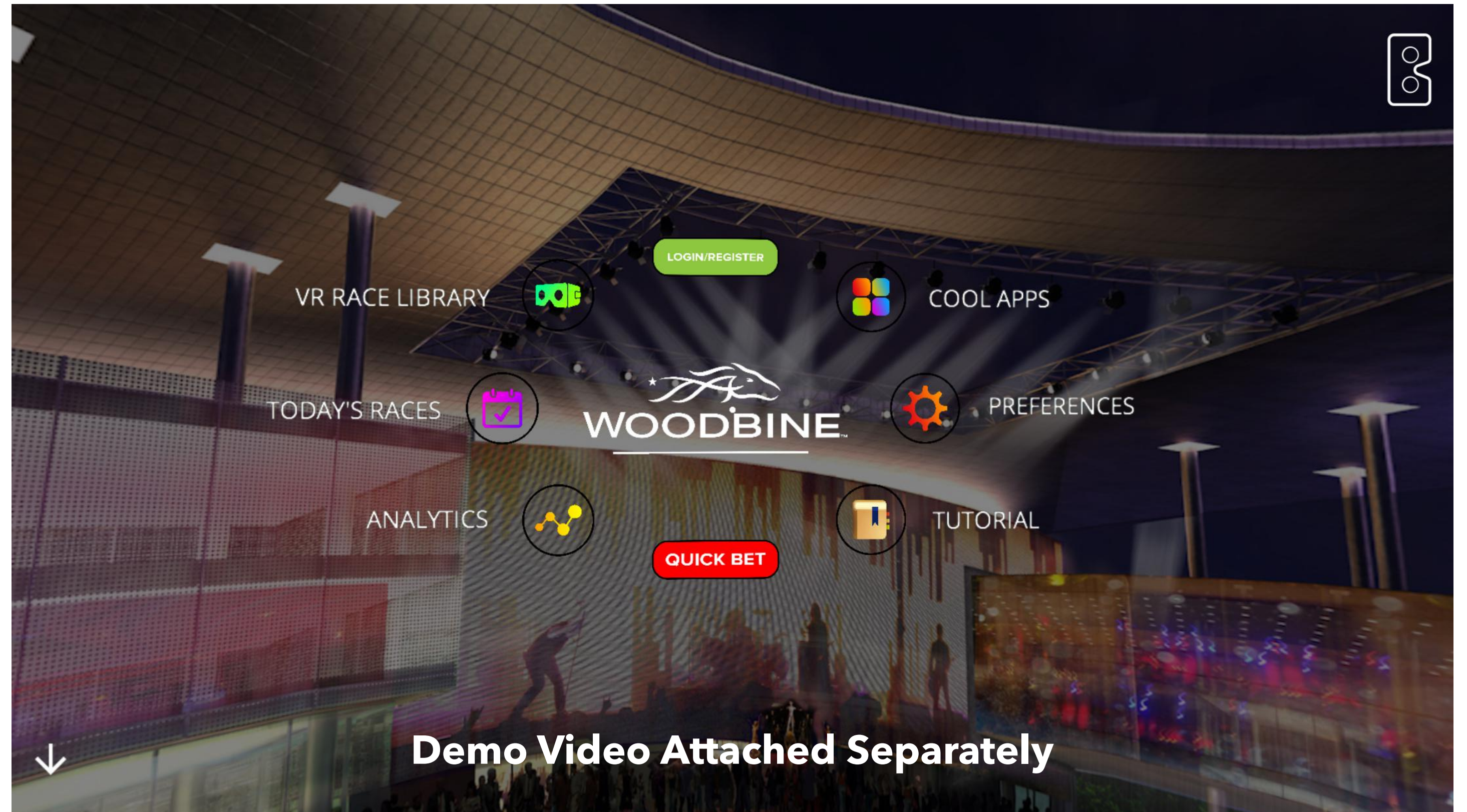
Key Takeaways

Use research to guide concept decisions
Instead of taking a standard approach asking the client to pick from several basic concepts, we let the research as described earlier dictate the design.

Engage the user throughout the process
By understanding what's important to the user, we were able to go beyond our Landscape Review and implement conceptual features that really expanded on their needs.

Work with an expert on the client side
We've worked with Eye Live before, but every project has its unique goals and challenges. We kept project sponsor in the loop with every new revision to ensure we were working as close to the vision as possible.

Set expectations early on and communicate regularly with client and collaborators
With the constraints and goals in mind, it's important to be clear and upfront with how we were going to approach the development, what compromises had to be made and what kind of touch-points the client can expect. It's also important to set expectations about how we planned to work early on and then reiterate them at every key meeting. This way we ensured that we are delivering what is expected.

Results

After 32 versions, the mobile virtual reality experience reached the MVP stage and was ready for launch. The virtual reality app worked without error on both Apple and Android devices, and with or without a mobile VR headset.

The client stated that their intention was not to win at the industry event, **Viva Technology**, in Paris, France and instead focus on capitalizing on potential business to be gained through the conference. Instead, **the app won Best of Show and received 64 times the development cost** from their award prize and garnered maximum attention at the show.

Since then, Eye Live is now working with major horse racing corporations (PMU, Woodbine, Saratoga) on implementing this technology into business models and service offering.