

High-tech fun rivals view at Seattle Space Needle

By [DONNA GORDON BLANKINSHIP](#)

Oct. 7, 2014 12:08 PM EDT

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12 photos



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But on a recent beautiful day, many in the crowd on the observation level of the Space Needle — one of Seattle's most popular tourist attractions — ignored the view of blue skies and puffy clouds over Elliott Bay.

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Upstairs, after watching the real city flash by as they ride up the glass-clad elevator, the next distraction is a giant photo wall populated with historic pictures — think Elvis Presley at the Space Needle — as well as photos taken by regular visitors to Seattle.

Tourists are then invited to find their home on a map on the photo wall and check in virtually. Many visitors take their own picture in front of the map. And some of them do this before they step outside on the observation deck to take a picture of Seattle for real.

It's time to start walking toward the view — the real view — but, wait, another new attraction catches their attention. And this one is seriously cool.

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Seattle's Space Needle gets a digital rebrand

338

Tanya Dua | August 14, 2014

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Seattle's iconic Space Needle is just a little more on-point now. The landmark tower has undergone a complete digital and mobile revamp this summer, including several new interactive elements to reconfigure the tourist experience.

Now, a visit to the popular West Coast tourist attraction will entail not just a view from its observation deck, but also a wide array of experiential activities alongside it, including a digital interactive wall called the SkyPad and immersive high-tech kiosks, among others. The experience can also be literally held in your hand, with the help of an accompanying mobile app that acts like a guide to it all.

"The Space Needle has been a symbol of innovation," said Karen Olson, vp of marketing at the attraction. "When there was so much digital change all around us, we couldn't not embrace it." She added that the idea was to also cater to the large family crowds that came to the venue and make it more immersive for children.

Olson added that they wanted to ensure that the Space Needle remained the go-to attraction in Seattle. "If you come to Seattle, and you want to be able to see everything in one day, you should come to the Space Needle," she said.

The move is a collaborative endeavor between several partners, including app developer [Fuerte](#); design and technology companies [Belle & Wissel](#) and [Creature](#); Microsoft; innovation studio [Stimulant](#) and production company [Voda](#). Other partners include [Group Delphi](#), [Idea Gateway](#), [OK Rocket](#), [Streamline Solutions](#), [Schuchart](#) and [Olson Kunding Architects](#).

"One of the greatest aspects of this project has been the local partnerships that made these experiences possible. Microsoft technology played an integral role, as did several top creative and interactive development agencies," said Olson, calling it the "Ocean's Eleven concert."

It's a natural fit for the Space Needle, sitting as it does in the cradle of the Pacific Northwest, and in what is the home of Microsoft. Once the tallest structure west of the Mississippi River, the observation tower was built in the Seattle Center for the 1962 World's Fair.

Now it has its own app, which presents facts and photos of surrounding sights, orienting visitors and helping them take a deeper dive into the history of the attraction. Through the app, guests can even experience “augmented reality” by pointing their phones at one of several unique “Space Spots” at various locations at the tower. These visual “Space Spots” place pre-created graphics of real-world visuals on your phone’s camera.

Look, ma, a digital mini Space Needle:



New kiosks, called “520 Teleporter Kiosks,” incorporate Microsoft’s Photosynth technology to provide visitors with virtual experiences like a trip to Pike Place Market through the eyes of a fish, or a ride on one of Seattle’s famous houseboats. With a mere click on one of the kiosk screens, guests can take a 360-degree tour of Seattle’s various experiences, without moving a foot.

“The aim was to make this touchscreen experience as user-friendly and engaging as possible,” Darren David, the founder and CEO of Stimulant, said.

Visitors can further enhance their virtual experience, with the 20 x 8 foot digital touchscreen SkyPad that displays thousands of photos of visits to the Space Needle from the early 60s to today. This is a digital step-up from the previous mural, and is interactive too, allowing guests to post photos of their own experiences or pin their hometowns on a digital globe in a kind of digital guest book.

“We pushed beyond what we thought was possible to offer our guests, and locals alike, experiences that are totally unique, memorable, and shareable,” Olson said. And it’s worked, with this last July being the best July ever for the Space Needle.

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The Space Needle Revamped: It's Not Just For Tourists



A fresh perspective of Seattle offered by this new and improved historical icon

The most recognized symbol of Seattle has gotten an experience overhaul, and locals may want to consider scheduling another visit. Last month, the Space Needle introduced a new interactive element that lets you view Seattle and the iconic building itself in a whole new light. And it's a welcome change in this digital age, complete with futuristic activities including everything from taking long-range selfies to teleportation. I don't know about you, but when I visit a landmark in any city, I see it, snap some photos, read some blurbs about the why and how, and then I'm ready to go eat lunch.

As much as I love Seattle and everything about it, that's what I was expecting to do on my first trip to the Space Needle. Check it off the must-see list. But how wrong I was. Before entering, I was told to download the Space Needle mobile app, which was the first step to enhance my visit.

Karen Olson, who has overseen the entire digitizing of the Space Needle experience, was my personal tour guide. Right from the start of my tour, she showed me just how hands-on everything was as we stood in line to go up to the observation deck. Even while waiting in line, which usually means crying babies, bored kids and sighing parents at most tourist attractions, you're engaged. For example, on the floor you'll find circular stickers called Space

10/29/2014

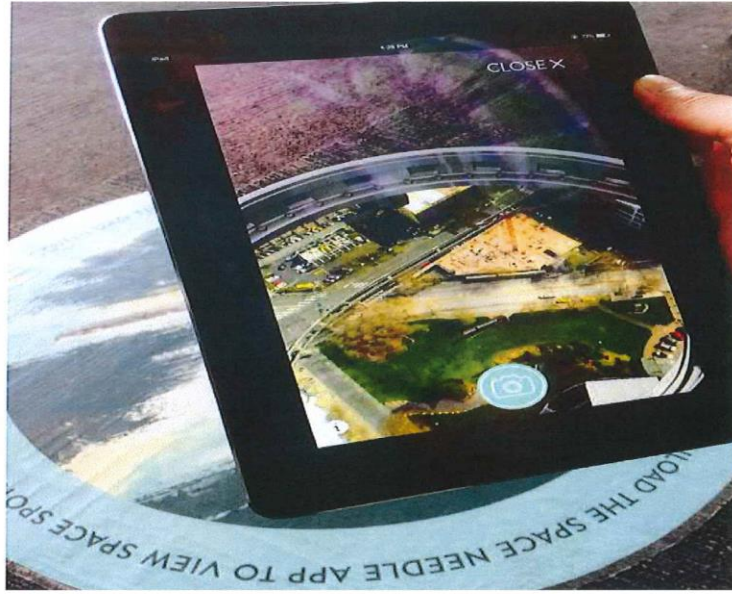
The Space Needle Revamped: It's Not Just For Tourists

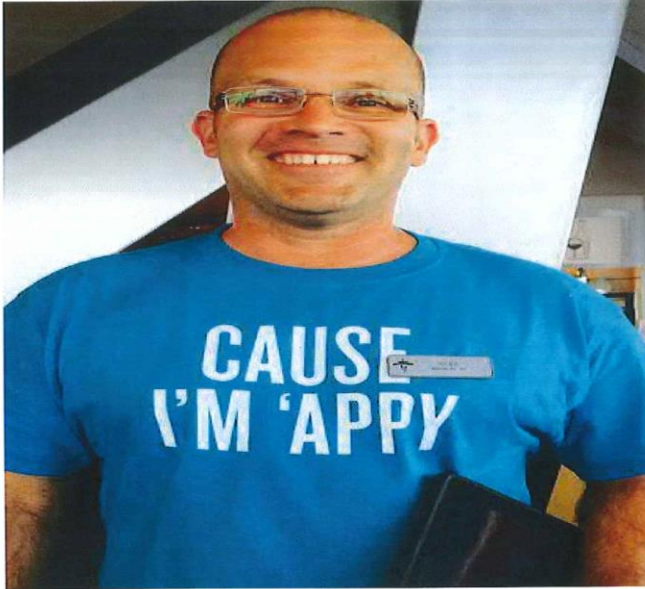
Spots that you stand on (see photo below). Then when a Space Spot is viewed through the Space Needle mobile app, a virtual tall-as-you Space Needle appears for picture-taking. This provided me with a few too many minutes of pure entertainment.



Photo courtesy of The Space Needle

Olson also showed me how I could unlock the capability to see through the floors on some of the Space Spots. Kids just loved this! They were engaged, asking questions and actually learning! In fact, I found that even I was retaining information better because all my sensory modalities were engaged. "It's for the young and young at heart," Olson says.





The tech-savvy "app-basadors" that help you navigate your way around the new exhibit
Photos by: Shuchi Mehta

Up next along the viewing edge of the observation deck: teleporting. The 520 Teleporter kiosks involve five large computers with interactive motion displays of some popular locations in Seattle (e.g. The Seattle Aquarium, Pike Place Market and Century Link Field). Using Microsoft's Photosynth technology, you're able to immerse yourself into a 3D dynamic screenshot of each of these locations. At one point, I was standing next to The Sounders' Clint Dempsey as the team huddled and shortly after, I was swimming next to a tentacled octopus at Seattle Aquarium without actually going anywhere.

For avid social media-ites, "Spacebook" is a user-friendly way to capture, store and share your photo memories of your visit to this historic Seattle building. Two more features for photo-savvy people that are brand new are the SkyHigh Selfie and the Zoomie. Use the specialized cameras to take a selfie with the ultimate zoomed-in view of downtown and Mount Rainier in the background.

10/29/2014

The Space Needle Revamped: It's Not Just For Tourists

On the inside wall of the observation deck, you'll find "Skypad," a huge digital media wall with scrolling photo strips, interactive maps and a huge memory for...your memories. Here, you can enter in your modern-day version of an "I was here" signature in one of the largest guestbooks in the world. Use the Skypad to see if someone from your neighborhood has made it to the top of the Needle, or famous people: I had no idea Elvis Presley had been to Seattle, much less the Space Needle.



The biggest "iPad" in the world? Probably.
Photo by: Shuchi Mehta

My favorite feature was the live-zoom camera next to the teleportation kiosks along the observation deck—an upgraded version of the standard telescope. The high-definition screens allow for panoramic, live and zoom-able views into different parts of Seattle. Want to find your house? Or peek into a Seahawk's game? Zoom away!



The gigantic and hi-tech cameras used for the Live Zoom kiosk which is inside
Photo by Shuchi Mehta

So locals, if you think you've been there and done that, you may be missing out on seeing all of Seattle from a whole new perspective. With the help and hard work of some big-time digital, media, and technology companies (most of them Seattle-based), the Space Needle has truly done an outstanding job of allowing all visitors and locals alike to experience the Space Needle in a captivating way.

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Article Reference:

[A Toast to Knute Berger: Best Space Needle Tour Guide Ever](#)

[Commemorative Space Needle Toppers](#)

[Back to the Future: Why Seattle's World's Fair Mattered](#)

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Originally published Tuesday, October 7, 2014 at 10:04 AM

View, what view? High-tech fun entrances Space Needle visitors

Virtual reality video, Space Needle app and giant photo-wall keep tourists happy — and some ignore the real-life view.

By DONNA GORDON BLANKINSHIP
Associated Press



Visitors to Seattle's Space Needle are treated to a gorgeous view of this waterfront city when skies are clear and the sun is shining.

But on a recent beautiful day, many in the crowd on the observation level of the Space Needle — one of Seattle's most popular tourist attractions — ignored the view of blue skies and puffy clouds over Elliott Bay.

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New high-tech attractions at Seattle's Space Needle take focus off the view

Published October 07, 2014 / Associated Press



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Step 1: Create a profile

More than a great view: How Seattle's iconic Space Needle is going digital

BY MÓNICA GUZMÁN ([HTTP://WWW.GEEKWIRE.COM/AUTHOR/MONIGUZMAN/](http://www.geekwire.com/author/moniguzman/)) on July 31, 2014 at 4:08 pm



Visitors check out the Space Needle's new 20-foot by 8-foot "SkyPad" interactive screen, one of several new interactive features at the Seattle landmark. (Photo: Mónica Guzmán)

Take the elevator to the top and enjoy the view. That's been the main attraction at Seattle's iconic Space Needle for pretty much all of its 52-year history.



(http://cdn.geekwire.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Karen_Cloudy-Needle.jpg)

Karen Olson, vice president of marketing for the Space Needle, poses with the virtual Needle — complete with rain and clouds — that rises from one of 18 new Space Spots. (Photo: Mónica Guzmán)

The Needle hopes to change that starting this summer with a series of impressive digital enhancements (<http://www.spaceneedle.com/press/>).

"We want to be the *and*," says Karen Olson, the Needle's vice president of marketing. "An amazing view, and look at *this*."

I took the ride up the 605-foot tower with Olson on a bright, clear day this week to get a look at the new digital features at the Seattle landmark.

I figured they would be creative but insignificant, particularly on that day. Who's going to look at a screen when the city sparkles like this, and Mt. Rainier, Mt. Baker and even Mt. St. Helens are part of the show?

But it was a couple of these new features — not the stellar view — that made me go, “Whoa.”

The most surprising were the “Space Spots,” 18 circles on the ground — eight up top, and 10 on the Needle’s lower “Launchpad” — that invite visitors to download the Space Needle’s new app (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/space-needle/id881112452?mt=8>) and point their phone’s camera. (You can also scan them from your computer screen (<http://www.spaceneedle.com/spacespots/>.)

It’s augmented reality done just for kicks, but done very well.



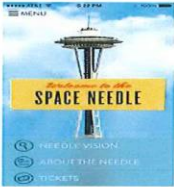
(<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/space-needle/id881112452?mt=8>)

If you point the new Space Needle app’s “Needle Vision” at this, you’ll see something pretty cool.

Point your phone at a spot downstairs and you’ll see the Needle rise up out of the floor, maybe in moving clouds and rain, or a Jetsons-style re-imagining with orange ships buzzing around. Try a spot upstairs and you’ll look through a glass floor to Seattle Center or to the Sky City restaurant one floor down.

Move around the circles and the 3D animations stay smooth, urging you to pose in, take and share pictures.

The problem with the Space Spots is that they’re too new. Two staff “app-bassadors” were on hand to show off the feature to pausing visitors, and the Needle estimates that 5 percent of them have downloaded the app (a rough division of total downloads by total visitors). But I didn’t see anyone other than Olson and me check them out.



(<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/space-needle/id881112452?mt=8>) Visibility was not an issue with “SkyPad,” the Needle’s new 20-foot-by-8-foot interactive touchscreen.

Ten percent of the Needle’s daily visitors have pinned their names and home cities on the screen’s global guestbook since it was installed a few weeks ago, adding to a sleek, easily browsable map record of many of the Space Needle’s more than 54 million total visitors.

The rest of the HD screen is a touchable, swipe-able, floor-to-ceiling photo collage of up to 2,300 Needle pictures, some as old as its construction, others as new as what visitors uploaded to spaceneedle.com a day before.

The screen, which was crowded with users, replaced a painted mural of celebrity visitors to the Space Needle over the years — highlighting a shift that digital technologies have made possible in shared cultural spaces like this one: Static exhibits that celebrated others can now be dynamic exhibits that let us celebrate ourselves.

A third eyebrow-raising feature, called the "520 Teleporter," appeared on interactive screens facing the deck. Visitors can choose a Seattle landmark — the Seattle Aquarium, a houseboat, even a Sounders game — and swipe to move through a stunning interactive scene, powered by Microsoft PhotoSynth technology, that combines high quality panoramas of, say, a Sounders huddle, with paths from the locker room to the field and to the stands after a goal.



Staff from Creature, the Seattle-based creative agency that's designed much of the Needle's rebranding, cameo as diners in a "Space Spot."

Another feature is a camera that will take selfies of deck visitors from a high, ideal angle, and high-res controllable HD cameras that pan and zoom to spots around the city. Kids were having a field day with one as I walked by.

One of the more ambitious new features, coming Aug. 11, is what the Needle is calling the "Zoomie." By posing and remotely activating a few cameras stationed a mile away near Kerry Park, visitors will be able to take zoomable pictures of themselves with the entire Space Needle.

That's going to be something.

The Needle is hosting parties for hotel concierges, tour guides and other nearby hospitality staff this week to show off the enhancements. Space Needle staff members are tracking app downloads, social sharing, feature use and other metrics to keep an eye on how well users respond.

No techie toy is going to beat the Needle's unobstructed view of our city on a summer day.

But on a cloudy one, some of these might get pretty close.



(<http://www.geekwire.com/author/moniguzman/>)

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Space Needle app launches new digital experiences

By Mark Hamstra

July 28, 2014



The Space Needle app includes augmented reality capabilities

A new mobile application geared for tourists visiting Seattle's Space Needle includes a high degree of functionality and helps weave the entire experience together with a range of on-site and at-home interactive opportunities.

The [Space Needle](#) mobile app includes an augmented reality feature and a guide to other attractions around the area, among other capabilities. It also helps connect visitors with the Space Needle's other digitally enhanced features, such as a touch-screen experience on site and innovative new photo tools.

"We decided that we should have an app that gives what you expect, as well as some things you don't expect," said Karen Olson, vice president of marketing at the Space Needle. "Our guests all arrive with this computer in their pockets, and we wanted to be able to leverage that to help enhance their visit.

"We took the approach that the app should be both functional and fun."

Built as a symbol of the future for the Age of Space 1962 World's Fair, the Space Needle towers 520 feet above the ground and often serves as the starting point for many visitors to the Seattle area.

Tool for tourists

The Space Needle app is designed not only to enhance the experience at the Space Needle itself, but also to help visitors explore other area attractions, such as [Chihuly Garden and Glass](#), and the [Museum of History & Industry](#). In addition, some of the app's augmented reality functionality extends to other locations around the region.

"If you are an explorer, this is the best tool to have in your pocket to see Seattle," said Ms. Olson. "That's part of the 'fun' aspect of the app — How do you see Seattle in a new way?"



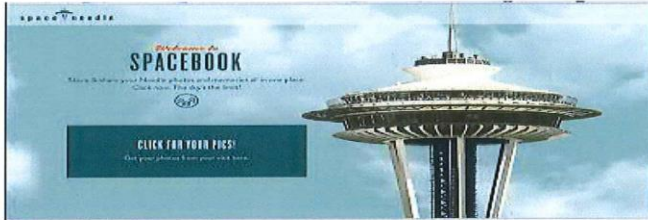
One of the app's features allows users experience augmented reality by pointing their smartphone or tablet at various designated areas around the Space Needle called "Space Spots." Users can watch the Space Needle rise up out of the ground with fireworks, or into a Jetsons-like space setting, among several other options.

Inside the attraction, users can point their mobile device at the floor and look down into the restaurant below or see "through" a virtual glass floor to the ground 50 stories below. Other augmented reality experiences are being added around the city where users can also enjoy the app.

The app is just one of a host of digitally enhanced experiences at the Space Needle. Others include a massive digital "SkyPad" — essentially the world's largest iPad at a whopping 20 feet by 8 feet — that

displays thousands of photos taken throughout the 52-year history of the Space Needle. And the 520 Teleporter digital kiosks use Microsoft's Photosynth technology to allow visitors to experience virtual 3D adventures in places like Seattle's famous Pike Place Market.

Earlier this summer the Space Needle launched SpaceBook, which allows visitors to create personalized photo experiences and save them to an online memory book. Additional photo experiences are planned for late this summer, including the "SkyHigh Selfie."



Creative partners

The Space Needle worked with local design shop [Creature](#) to create the digital experience, including the mobile app. Creature had also designed the Web site, and it crafted the app to mimic the look and feel of the site — which includes such unique touches as upward scrolling to capture the spirit of the towering structure.

The app developer was London-based [Fuerte](#). Other partners in the on-site digital experience included Group Delphi, Idea Gateway, Microsoft, OK Rocket, Olson Kundig Architects, Schuchart, Stimulant, Streamline Solutions and Voda Studios.

Given that Seattle is such a hub for technical innovation, and that the Space Needle symbolizes a vision of the future, Ms. Olson said the whole experience, including the app, was created to reflect that sense of marvel.

"In the soft launch, people have been raving about it," she said. "Guests are engaging with it. The biggest feedback we have had here is that families want this. They want their kids to be engaged, because if the kids are not engaged, the families are not enjoying the experience."

Ms. Olson joined the Space Needle about a year ago specifically to enhance the site's digital presence after a career in technology and marketing. She said the latest efforts represent a look toward the 22nd century, much like the 1962 World's Fair was look toward the 21st century.

"We had our 50th anniversary not too long ago," she said. "This is about looking ahead to the next 50 years."

Final Take

Mark Hamstra is content director at Mobile Marketer, New York

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