

After GYDR's First Steps: What Dreams May Come

The foregoing discussion of Pictoura's objectives for the GYDR initiative, and the GYDR ecosystem (i.e. the Pictoura ecosystem), covered a wide swath of territory—which will take many thousands of hours of focused and dedicated work to fully explore. But—even as we acknowledge the dangers of putting the cart before the horse—we recognize that it's absolutely crucial for us to articulate a vision for the company in the long term, both internally and externally.

More than anything, what we're selling is an idea with the potential to proliferate—what evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins called a *meme* (the cultural counterpart to biology's gene). It's the seed of a new way of learning and living—one that we believe has the potential to spread throughout the collective consciousness. But the idea didn't spring forth *sui generis* out of an empty void; it emerged naturally out of the dialectic between society and its technological creations—which is a more complex and nuanced way of saying that we wouldn't have invented it if the infrastructure weren't already available and if other companies (e.g. Airbnb and Uber) hadn't blazed the trail for us. Furthermore, the maturation of the idea won't take place in a void either; it's our hope that the GYDRs and travelers who use our products will be more than just customers—that they will be our partners in its development.

Most directly, that means asking our customers pointed questions about who they are, and what it is that they want (or think they want) out of GYDR, and life in general. Granted, people may not have a natural inclination to indulge us in these research activities. However, our products/services will supply us with some obvious leverage: discounts and credits that can be applied to tours and tour-related products. With proper incentives in place, a wide variety of tools might be used to achieve our research goals: everything from simple online questionnaires about what our customers liked and did not like about their selected tour, or the experience of giving a tour, to complex psychological assessments devised by contracted professionals. Somewhere therein we would also likely employ a variant on traditional A/B testing: presenting travelers with different versions of faux GYDR tours, GYDR profiles, as well as other prospective products, and asking them to explain why one option is more appealing than another.

All of those research activities would certainly help us deliver the kinds of Travel Experiences our customers know they want; but they would also provide us with a way to engage them in a conversation about less intuitive applications for the GYDR concept. People already possess clarity regarding their need for a GYDR when they are out of their element: in an unfamiliar location where they do not understand the culture, or engaging in an activity of interest where they have little knowledge. However, it may be harder for them to imagine that the same frame of mind indigenous to conventional Travel Experiences might also be appropriate close to home—that GYDR isn't just a companion suitable for a journey or special event, but a stalwart assistant in their day-to-day lives as well. It will be incumbent upon us to demonstrate the existence of this additional GYDR dimension for them.

Speculation regarding what the total realization of GYDR's potential would look like—and how we might implement the GYDR concept in a way that would represent a radical departure from the foregoing discussion—requires us to reference circumstances, methodologies, and technologies, still shrouded in mystery, as all things still undreamt necessarily must be. More than anything, these speculations revolve around the assumption that we will be able to forge an intimate relationship between GYDR and the public at large, that people will learn to understand GYDR as an extension of their own capacity for self-actualization: the innate drive to become everything that one is capable of becoming, and to know one's true self.

This intimate relationship would grow organically as we refined our techniques for extracting data about the populace, in terms of both demographics and individuals, and would only reach maturity if, and when, we achieve a quantum leap in the ability to synthesize meaning out of that data (i.e. the ability to apply complex algorithms, infused with sociological and psychological insights regarding the realization of human potentials, to that data). Such a remit would require us to break new ground in many fields of human inquiry traditionally reserved for academia: the social sciences, applied philosophy, and artificial intelligence. But, we think, after a certain point, the metamorphosis of GYDR into a true vehicle for self-actualization would start to gather inertia: after people see GYDR's seed take root and begin to blossom—as evidenced by powerful, transformative, experiences in their own lives—they will become our willing co-conspirators in the process, eager to supply us with the kind of data and encouragements that will help *us* help *them*.

What we're talking about here is something much bigger than one product (i.e. GYDR), or one company (i.e. Pictoura), or one commercial modality (i.e. the "sharing economy"). The advent of the internet was, indisputably, the catalyst for a revolution in the economic and social spheres of human civilization; but it could also, in time, do the same for the personal sphere: the orientation of individual human beings towards their own lives. This sketch of one possible future for GYDR is fundamentally optimistic; it is undergirded by an unshakeable faith in both the human race—that, deep down, we really do want to be a great people—and the power of technology to liberate us. But it's a faith grounded in an objective appraisal of reality. Amongst the ranks of persons who have achieved admirable things and, in so doing, became inspirations to others, many could point to pivotal moments when they read the right book at the right time, or met the right person who told them exactly what they needed to hear, or chanced upon an exciting new vocation or craft or discipline that would become their life's work. If technology can give us the power to split the atom, communicate instantaneously with any point on the globe, and send a man to the moon, why can't it help us find those pivotal moments?

Of course, that distant Shangri-La lies at the end of a very long and windy road. However, standing on our doorstep, knapsack at the ready and boots still unworn, we needn't fret about the likelihood of failure; should we gather the courage to step onto the road before us, we need only aim for the horizon, secure in the knowledge that all of life is an experiment—and, if that is our fate, we must do the best we can.