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BRITISH PUBS TO BECOME VIRTUAL FOOTBALL GROUNDS

British pubs and bars are spending millions of pounds to turn their venues into 'virtual football stadia', in a bid to bring more customers through their doors.

Pub groups across the country are investing in costly 3D and high-definition TV upgrades in preparation for climax of the football season, FA Cup, Champions League and the World Cup.

They hope to see a bumper eight weeks, where wall-to-wall drinkers, will cheer on their teams in the company of likeminded fans.

Research by the Walkabout sports bar chain amongst over 2,000 people shows that 25% of British men plan to watch at least three World Cup matches in a pub during the Tournament.

Over one in ten men (11%) say that they will watch every England match in pub. The sports bar's study suggests that the average spend per customer heading to a pub to watch a big football match could be as much as £21 per visit.

The British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) estimates that a good run by the England team at the World Cup could be worth more than £124 million to the pub industry.

The Walkabout chain is one bar group heavily backing the rising popularity of 3D TV.

It says it will be the first sports bar chain in the UK to offer 3D viewing across its estate. All 37 bars (from Edinburgh to Plymouth) will have multiple, 47 inch, 3D TVs installed in time for the World Cup tournament, which begins on 11 June in South Africa.

According to Walkabout's own research, there is a real appetite for watching World Cup games in 3D. They claim that a third (33%) of the nation's sports fans, under the age of 35, are interested in prospect of watching a World Cup game in 3D.

Over a quarter (27%) of all football fans say that they would pay an entry fee into a pub to specifically be guaranteed the chance to see a key game in 3D.

The research suggests fans would be willing to pay, on average, £7 each to guarantee a place in front of a 3D screen.

FIFA has announced plans to deliver 3D images from up to 25 matches in South Africa.

The BBC and ITV have yet to reveal any 3D match schedules but ESPN, the cable television channel, has already confirmed that it will be screening 3D World Cup matches in the USA. However 'soccer' fans across the pond will need to pay over \$2,000 for the high-tech TVs.

Such is the speed at which 3D technology has been adopted by pubs that Sky predicts that over a thousand pubs and clubs will have a 3D-ready TV set installed in time for tomorrow's [Saturday's] 3D channel launch and the Premier League clash between Manchester United and Chelsea. Just nine pubs showed Sky's first 3D match, between Arsenal and Manchester United, back in January.

James Mawer, commercial manager at Walkabout, said: "3D football in pubs will be the next best thing to actually being at a match.

"Fans will get to enjoy a great atmosphere, a cold pint and a unique viewing experience. It will change the way we see pub football forever.

"For the World Cup we are also looking into constructing stands in some of our larger bars to add to the 'virtual stadium' experience.

"We know our venues will be busy and, with space at a premium, the only way to accommodate more people will be to 'build upwards' with a banked seating area."

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Research was carried out by Walkabout amongst a national representative sample of 2,002 adults aged 18+ between 26-28 March 2010.

For more information

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