Augmented reality: more than just fun and games

By Jason Ried   15 Jul 2016

The Pokemon Go augmented reality (AR) mobile game has taken the world by storm - even before its worldwide launch - sending fans out into the streets in droves, and leaving businesses wondering how to capitalise on this phenomenon.

Jason Ried

While the success of this game has ignited interest in the possibilities of AR, the applications of this technology extend far beyond gaming; it can provide consumers with a far more engaging experience, and businesses with a deeper level of understanding of their customers, building brand loyalty.

Knowing your customer

There's more to AR than just being a tool to keep customers informed or engaged; companies can use data collected from the AR apps to learn more about their customers' needs, and even help anticipate future preferences or requirements. Some companies have used AR to help cleverly visualise their product catalogue in the comfort of your own home, while fashion retailers have used AR to create virtual mirrors or changing rooms, where customers can 'try out' clothes, cosmetics, jewellery and even footwear.

A leading car brand used AR to enable customers visiting selected **dealerships** to 'see' a high definition 3D version of an upcoming model, allowing them to walk around the vehicle, and change colours or add optional extras to the vehicle. While this created an exciting and interactive experience, it also helped gather valuable insights into colour and feature preferences which could then inform manufacturing processes.

Using AR in this manner helps companies reduce costs; the data gathered can help identify trends, allowing businesses to tailor their stock to suit the demand more closely. When coupled with geolocation information, companies making use of such apps can learn more about their customers' traveling habits, and provide them with information and deals that are more location-relevant.

Retail stores can use AR-enabled apps to provide customers with additional information on product availability and special promotions, and to drive foot traffic to physical stores. Locally, some retail outlets have also incorporated games and rewards into their AR apps, which have also taken on the functionality of a loyalty programme.

In the **tourism** industry, AR is being used to provide tourists with information and assistance with public transportation, as virtual guides in popular tourist areas or in museums, and more recently, to assist with translating posters, signs and other visual material. Information collected from such apps can then identify the most popular attractions, pinpoint which areas need better access to public transportation, and even what additional languages to add to signage at tourist hotspots.

Reinvent your business processes

AR is also moving beyond the realm of **sales, marketing and advertising**, with a global enterprise software company introducing applications that use AR - coupled with smart glasses - in the working environment, to help company employees work smarter.

An app for **warehouse** workers provides them with information on what goods are required, and where they are located, helping them cut down on the time needed to complete their tasks, while another provides technicians with hands-free visualisation, voice-activated commands and even the ability to connect with technical experts.

Increased access to affordable smartphones coupled with improved mobile broadband coverage and decreasing data costs means that we could be seeing just the start of the use of AR in South Africa, be it to better understand customers, gauge market demand, to drive brand loyalty and engagement, or even to help employees perform their jobs more efficiently.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Ried, MD at Fuzzy Logic.

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com