

"People stare when I open my copy of Dog Breeder's Monthly"

● The value of media brands, page 8

## ALL ABOUT...

# Augmented reality

It is no longer just science fiction, write David Blecken and Anita Davis

It's fast becoming marketing's latest buzz phrase, but what exactly is augmented reality, and what is its potential? The phrase has been around since the 90s, but has been regarded as a form of science fiction rather than a marketing tool. Now that is changing.

**1** Simply, augmented reality is the merger of the real, physical world and computer-generated data (or virtual reality). This new technology blurs the line between what's real and what's computer-generated by enhancing what we see around us. A basic example is that of a tourist in a foreign city pointing a smartphone at a museum and receiving on-screen information detailing opening hours, exhibitions and entrance fees; a recent iPhone application directs users in New York to the nearest subway station for every train line relative to their position. If augmented reality navigation can progress at the same feverish development pace as the rest of the app world we could all be holding our phones in front of our faces like spyglasses.

**2** Video games will drive the online development of augmented reality, but this technology will have countless applications. Adrian Roche, digital lead at OgilvyOne Japan, says that the technology can theoretically function on "anything with a decent processor", including sophisticated mobile handsets such as the iPhone and computers (a solid broadband connection is also essential). Users must first download supporting software. The user presents an object or printed sheet, prompting the application to appear on-screen. Amnesia Group founder Iain McDonald notes that with software designed to search for a specific image, the technology requires less sophistication than a QR code. "You just need a recognisable, high-contrast shape or series of shapes," he says.

**3** The potential for brands to engage consumers is considerable. "I think this is the missing link [marketers] have been looking for," Roche says, pointing out that it enables users to experience a product free of charge in a real-life situation relevant to their needs. He cites a US campaign by Home Depot that enables users to visualise a room in their home in different paint colours. "You get to experience things very closely. People are able to make a much more educated decision because they can see the product in their own universe."

The main advantage of augmented reality is that it can offer a level of enjoyment and participation not previously present in advertising



Augmented reality... smartphones can deliver virtual versions of real places

## What it means for...

### ADVERTISERS

- The technology offers a memorable way to capture audiences' attention — if nothing else, the novelty factor of augmented reality will make a campaign seem cool and futuristic.
- Augmented reality should be approached in the same way as mobile applications. The most effective campaigns will be those that provide a service to users.

### DIGITAL AGENCIES

- The technology used to create these campaigns is not especially sophisticated, as much of the digital coding comes from open-source logarithms. Instead, prepare to spend an arduous amount of time on the Flash programming in order to create an in-depth campaign.
- Augmented reality campaigns are bound to run into technical problems on the users' end. Among the common hurdles are poor lighting that hinders webcams from picking up shapes, and the need for a speedy web connection to view campaigns adequately.

campaigns, complementing above-the-line work. While there have so far been few examples of augmented reality in Asian marketing, notable US and European campaigns include Fanta's Bluetooth-enabled virtual tennis and BMW's Z4 in 3D, which sees users control the car from their keyboard to drive around on an onscreen image of their desk.

"It's another tool to get people to interact. It's not just about having a 3D product on a screen, but creating branded games," advises Michael Keferl, director of C-Scout Japan, a trend consultancy.

**4** While the prospects are exciting, it will be some time — at least two years — before augmented reality is refined into a readily applicable marketing discipline, according to Gregory Birge, managing director of F5 Digital Consulting.

Whether it will live up to its potential remains to be seen, particularly in Asia, where Roche says clients are in need of education to appreciate the medium fully. And although McDonald says there are no major technical challenges to building an augmented reality campaign, he points out that not all users have the necessary equipment — such as a webcam or powerful smartphone — to make use of the technology. In addition, markets such as Japan, despite being open to the concept, are likely to be held back by inconsistency of standards between handset makers, according to Jonny Shaw, partner at Naked Tokyo.

Birge cautions against premature over-enthusiasm for something that is currently little more than an amusing diversion.

"Innovation is good, but at the moment it brings fun with no real benefit," he points out, explaining that many companies will be wary of investing what can amount to significant sums in an unproven technology.

### Got a view?

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## PERSPECTIVE

# The age of interruption is dead. Long live the age of, er, interruption

When was the last time you were told something along the lines of 'the age of interruption is dead'? Probably not long ago. It's a line that crops up in agency presentations, and some of the more excitable trade publications, with alarming regularity. It is one of marketing's current mantras — the ideas that get passed around the industry and repeated so much that they may as well be true. By now we all know the theory — media channels are fragmenting, TV ads don't work, the consumer is in control, brands are playing by new rules, etc etc. The upshot being that interrupting consumers in their daily lives via traditional advertising — particularly TV — is old hat, isn't effective, and can't compete with all the shiny new social media toys at a marketer's disposal.

There's clearly some truth in that. But two things I've seen in the past week suggest that the situation is far more subtle than the new marketing dogma suggests.

## What strategy has YouTube conjured up to turn a buck? Banner ads and pre-rolls, the online versions of print and TV ads

First up was the news that YouTube might finally be on the path to profit. The video site has tried all manner of social media sorcery in its quest to monetise. So what strategy has it finally conjured up to turn a buck? Simple — banner ads and pre-rolls, the online versions of print and TV ads. It's slightly embarrassing for YouTube, which has in the past gone out of its way not to disturb its viewers' enjoyment, but frankly, it needs the cash.

"It's a positive surprise," admitted Google chief Eric Schmidt. "As more professional content moves onto the web, people are more willing [to watch an ad]."

But hold on, there's more. Digital agency Razorfish last week released a survey called Fluent, an in-depth survey of consumers' attitudes to different media channels. It's full of useful stats and tips about working in social media. But buried on pages 18 and 19 appear two tables. The first looks at what sources of information people trust when it comes to product purchases. There at number two, behind 'offline friends', is the humble TV ad — ahead even of 'expert online reviews'. The second table was based on asking consumers how authentic a brand sounded in different media. And what came top? Television. Take that new media! Just to rub it in, print and radio came second and third.

Just to be clear, this doesn't mean a brand should simply ignore social media and keep chucking ads at consumers from all angles. But maybe marketers shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. These two stories suggest that consumers are willing to be interrupted to a limited degree in exchange for free, professional-level content. That brands are seen as trusted and authentic in the most interruptive media. And that media owners are able to make a living by carrying these ads.

Maybe interruption has something going for it after all.

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