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VR & AUGMENTED REALITY: THE YEAR AHEAD



We live in an age of rapidly changing technology. Ten years ago the idea of driverless cars would have been science fiction and far-fetched SF at that. Now prototypes are on the roads, and you can ride in them if you like. The pace of technology adoption has been measured: it took around 20 years for refrigerators to be in over 80% of US homes, but only ten for microwave ovens to reach that point in the 1980s, and about five for smartphones get that market sector dominance recently.

So it won't take long for Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR) devices to be a mass phenomenon, rather than confined to a few geeky "early adopters".

What is the Difference?

Virtual Reality is a constructed artificial world, for example, the surface of another planet, or the bottom of the sea.

Augmented Reality is where computer constructed 3D images are overlaid over the real world, such as the game where you "see" Pokemon characters as you walk around the street.

Mixed Reality is a stage further than that, where you can interact with both the real world and the artificially created one. Microsoft's Mixed Reality app allows you to place virtual "post-it" type notes to remind you of things in your reality.

What is to Come in 2019?

Simulation Training

Many areas of work are in difficult or dangerous conditions. Obviously, pilots have been trained in simulators for years, but now, with AR people can work in mining, oil prospecting, undersea, and in other hazardous environments, including the military, without having to risk their lives, by training in a virtual simulation.

Medical Training

It has always been difficult to train medical personnel in critical procedures in surgery. It is unethical to experiment on a real person, and yet books and classroom training are insufficient. A collaboration between Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles and surgical streaming media platform GIBLIB has created a [virtual operating theatre](#) where surgeons can learn and refine their skills in advanced techniques like robot-assisted surgery and keyhole operations.

Service Industries

UPS is using [VR headsets](#) to simulate driving a truck around and making deliveries. Because this sector is prone to a high turnover of employees, and they need to be safely trained before being sent out to customers, the VR ensures that each trainee is given a consistent standard of training and instruction in how to deal with hazards like parked cars and pedestrians.

AR Home Furniture Assistance

We have all bought a product which looked fine in the showroom but didn't fit in when we brought it home. IKEA has launched an app which sets a piece of furniture into your room: the [IKEA Place app](#). Using your iPhone camera you can put a correctly-scaled chair, for example, into your office. It uses Apple's ARKit augmented reality platform to place photorealistic furniture items in the frame at the touch of the screen, correctly-sized down to the millimetre. Users can walk right up and peer at fabrics and colours.

Improving Manufacturing

VR, AR and MR technologies are going to improve product quality, for example, a worker might be machining a part. Using MR goggles he or she could have an overlay of what the finished product should look like, and by being connected with lathe control software could give a visual or audible warning if mistakes were being made thereby improving efficiency.

Overall Trends

According to a [report](#) published last year by Zion Market Research, global augmented reality market was valued at around £2.5 billion in 2015 and is expected to reach approximately £102 billion in 2021, growing at a rate of about 85% per year between 2016 and 2021.

The introduction of AR products in a wide variety of different situations, from retail like the IKEA app to industrial production and highly specialised training such as surgeons and deep-sea exploration, will embed virtuality into many different strata of our society. Perhaps in future, you won't go to the theatre, but put on some goggles at home, and be able to walk around an immersive performance by the great actors of the Royal Shakespeare Company?

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