A look at augmented reality (AR)

By Mark Schefermann   17 Jul 2012

Before you proceed to read this post, I would highly recommend you download at least one of the apps below. These are the current AR industry leaders. However, here is a short video that explains AR in "Plain English", click here.

String - App
String website

Blippar - App
Blippar website

Zappar - App
Zappar website

Junaio - App
Junaio website

Acrossair - App
Acrossair website

Augmented reality or AR as it is commonly referred to, is like a QR code on steroids. Instead of using a QR code to link a consumer to an online experience a trigger (which can be an image, logo, or basically anything you want it to be) is used. If you watched the video above, you will see that AR is basically creating a virtual experience.

In many cases this is a done for the "wow factor" and quite a gimmicky marketing tactic however it can have a lot of practical uses as well. AR takes traditional media like print and even TV in some cases to a whole new "digital" level. It creates a unique and intriguing experience that gets consumers talking about your brand and creates "viral" word-of-mouth.

Locally I have not come across any brands that have done anything to the extent of the AR apps listed above but I am sure in the next six months we will see more exciting AR executions. Acrossair is what they call an augmented reality browser that allows you to perform normal search queries like looking for restaurants, banks, bars etc. and it then renders the results through AR. With this app you can even see tweets (where the profiles have allowed their location to be used) within a certain kilometre radius (which you can define), so now you can see what your neighbours are tweeting about.

If you hold your mobile horizontally it actually shows a Google Map with the actual locations of the things you are searching

for and then if you hold your mobile vertically it then renders the AR experience. With this app there is even a "Car Finder" function where you can actually pin the location of your car when you park and then later you can use the app to locate your car using AR showing the distance and direction.

Practical uses

The AR browser is a great example of how AR can be used practically, imagine you are in Paris and want to find the closest Tube station, no worries, open up the app and then see where the closest tube station is. You can also start to imagine how location-based marketing could suddenly start to play a huge role in this space. You could search for a restaurant closest to you and perhaps 5 results are displayed however one of those five restaurants could be paying for location based marketing and then at that point show a special of 50% off (where do you think the consumer is going to go?).

And in SA?

In terms of South Africa, I believe FNB is going to lead the AR race. The bank already has augmented reality apps in their dotFNB branches for their different products and the FNB history (using the logo as a trigger) and with the recent launch of their Geo Payments service you can see that their strategy is to get as many South Africans to download the FNB app whether they are customers or not.

The biggest barriers to technology like AR and QR codes are:
1. Education (you first have to explain to consumers how it works etc.)
2. App (consumers normally have to download some sort of App to use AR or a QR code).

With FNB leading the race in terms of consumers downloading their app and already having the AR technology in place, I believe we will soon see print ads with a call to action like "Open the FNB App and select the 'AR' tab which will then open the camera functionality (AR)". This will allow consumers to be able to digitally experience the campaign or product offering and possibly even convert at that point through the app or at least complete a lead form.

This will then strengthen their positioning as being the "leader in innovation and technology". This will also then change the game in terms of traditional media measurement metrics, suddenly you will be able to measure the number of AR activations, where they used the AR, what devices they used etc. (great consumer insights). I would also then imagine that they would integrate an AR branch and ATM locator.

If you follow the Blippar Facebook Page you will see all of their latest blipps and you can start to see how globally, big brands are starting to use AR in their normal print Ads. You can also see what sort of "calls to action" they are including in the AR, usually these are "like us on Facebook", "follow us on Twitter", "watch a video" and "visit the website". I would recommend you go and try it out and experience it for yourself.

Find your nearest police station

Junaio is another example of an AR browser; they have actually integrated all the South African police stations into their system. You are able to search for a police station and it then renders the AR results showing how far they are away from you and then it has click to call functionality, link to their website and their address. It also gives you a couple of different options in terms of how the results are displayed, this is another practical example of how AR can be used.

AR is awesome and I love the unique and interactive experience that it offers but I believe this technology will only reach tipping point once the two barriers mentioned above are addressed and it needs to have a practical use in order to truly show ROI.

ABOUT MARK SCHEFERMANN

My knowledge and enthusiasm for the digital world enables me to think creatively and challenge briefs. My passion is strategy and showing how digital can open new opportunities for clients. Well conceived digital strategies and campaigns will push brands ever forward in the consciousness of their audiences and lead to long lasting adoption, advocacy and allow them to forge individual relationships with their audiences.

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