

CIO JOURNAL.

IKEA Readies Augmented Reality App for Shoppers, Using Apple Tech

IKEA bets an augmented reality app for Apple devices will improve the furniture shopping experience

By **SARA CASTELLANOS**

Jun 21, 2017 4:11 pm ET



With IKEA's new augmented reality mobile app for Apple Inc. devices, users will have a full view of their room through the cameras on their devices and can visualize how a piece of furniture will look in their real environment. *PHOTO: IKEA*

IKEA plans to unveil an augmented reality application for Apple Inc. iPhones and iPads this fall that will let customers visualize how a piece of furniture such as a couch or coffee table would look in their living rooms before they make a purchase.

“We’ll give them confidence before buying,” said Michael Valdsgaard, head of digital transformation for Inter IKEA Systems B.V., the parent company of IKEA.

Augmented reality, which superimposes digital content onto a user’s view of the real world through mobile devices or headsets, has already found myriad use cases in factory floors at enterprises. Now, retailers such as IKEA and online home furnishings company Wayfair Inc. are seeing value in augmented reality technology that could make shopping for furniture more enjoyable and also offer competitive advantages.

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Michael Valdsgaard, head of digital transformation for Inter IKEA Systems B.V., the parent company of IKEA. *PHOTO: IKEA*

IKEA has teams in The Netherlands, Sweden and the U.S. ranging from interior designers to professors working to build out the mobile app, said Mr. Valdsgaard. An Apple spokeswoman confirmed that IKEA is using its augmented reality platform to build its app. IKEA plans to release the app this fall timed with Apple’s launch of iOS 11 software.



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Within the IKEA app, users will have a full view of their room through the cameras on iPads or iPhones running iOS 11 software. Hundreds of living room furnishings such as coffee tables, couches and floor lamps will be available for users to drop into their camera view. More IKEA products will be added in later versions of the app, Mr. Valdsgaard said.

Apple's augmented reality platform, announced earlier this month and called ARKit, allows the user to see a piece of furniture as if it were physically in the room. The size dimensions and color are near true to life, said Mr. Valdsgaard. Apple has said the system uses camera data to find horizontal planes in a room and estimate the amount of light available.

Mr. Valdsgaard said the possible financial benefits for IKEA were not considered in developing the augmented reality app. Rather, it was IKEA's commitment to customer experience and the company's desire to stay relevant and innovative that drove the augmented reality project.

But augmented reality could help increase conversion rates and possibly help prevent returns for items that are often bulky and expensive, said Brendan Witcher, principal analyst at Forrester Research Inc. who specializes in retail strategy.

"This removes customer pain-points," Mr. Witcher said, adding that augmented reality could help customers be more educated, confident buyers.

The technology could also be a competitive advantage for IKEA as more retailers look to add value to consumer shopping experiences, he said.

"The hyper-stimulated consumer isn't just looking to shop, they're looking for experience, engagement and brands that make the shopping journey enjoyable," he said.

Other furniture retailers are offering consumers the chance to envision how a product will look in their homes, scaled to size, through augmented reality applications on mobile devices.

Online home furnishings company Wayfair Inc. launched an augmented reality app last year using Google Inc.'s augmented reality platform, Tango. The app is available on the Lenovo Phab 2 Pro and the upcoming Asus ZenFone AR smartphones, and allows users to visualize furniture and decor in their homes before making a purchase.

Roughly 40 million people in the U.S. are expected to use augmented reality this year, up 30% from last year, according to research firm eMarketer, cited previously by WSJ. It estimates the total will rise to 54 million in 2019.

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