

How AR is changing the way consumers shop



Neal Leavitt

+ FOLLOW

AUGUST 26, 2016

For years, furniture buying was often a leap of faith. You could measure the available space for a sofa, chair, dining room table, perhaps take some pictures, then walk into a store, select what you think would work, and hope for the best.

Homeware retailer Ikea conducted research in 2014 that seemingly corroborated the challenges customers face in selecting furniture:

- More than 70 percent said they didn't know big their homes were;
- 14 percent of customers purchased wrong-sized furniture for their rooms;
- 33 percent said they were confused about how to properly measure for furniture.

Those days are long gone.

Enter augmented reality (AR). The technology lays a computer-generated image over an image picked up the camera of a smartphone or tablet -- in effect, it adds a layer of digital data or images to the real world.

And next month both furniture retailers and customers will benefit from the intro of Google Tango that initially will be available on a Lenovo smartphone, the Phab 2 Pro. As reported by Smithsonian.com, via motion-tracking cameras, sensors and software, Tango will enable a mobile device to create 3D maps of indoor spaces and also reorient the map based on where the phone is in those spaces. The Phab 2 phones will have depth perception thanks to a sensor that utilizes infrared light to ascertain depth by how light is shaped by various objects in a room. So with Tango, sofas, chairs, etc. can be

integrated into the simulation along with the actual motion of your body.

"Once a Phab 2 phone creates a map of a room and stores it, you'll be able to select a digitized image of a piece of furniture, insert it on to the 3D map, and then move it around so you can see how it looks in different places and from different angles," notes Smithsonian.

And Forbes added that a "Tango enabled device knows where doors, windows, shelves and the like are so that in the future, when you visit a large store, you can find what you need right down to the exact shelf."

Retailers are seeing gold in the technology. Lowe's is rolling out a Tango app called Lowe's Vision this fall. Shoppers, for instance, could point a Phab 2 at their laundry room and see how different washers and dryers will fare in that space.

And Wayfair Inc., a home furnishings company, recently unveiled WayfairView, a first-party smartphone AR app available in Google Play. The company says the app allows shoppers to visualize furniture and décor in their homes at full-scale before making a purchase. Via the Phab 2, a customer can choose a Wayfair product and virtually fit in a room to see if passes muster in that space. Wayfair says shoppers will also be able to move and rotate products "to visualize various layouts and perspectives... and when ready to make a purchase, shoppers will be seamlessly connected to Wayfair's shopping app in Google Play."

And while AR probably won't preclude getting in the car and driving to the furniture store or outlet, some furniture executives think that's just fine.

Scott Perry, VP of digital for Jerome's, a well-known regional furniture chain, said he doesn't see AR replacing the store experience.

"We want them to see it, feel it, love it before they buy it, because that makes for a happier customer," said Perry. However, shoppers, noted Perry, who virtually see items in their home are 35 percent more likely than other website visitors to call the company or get directions to a store location, and 65 percent more likely to buy.

Many experts believe AR will help bolster brick-and-mortar retailers.

"I do think it's a game-changer for the retail industry," said Artemis Berry, VP of retail for Shop.org and the National Retail Federation. "What we know right now, though, is that it's in the very early stages."



Neal Leavitt

Neal established Leavitt Communications in 1991. He brings to clients a unique blend of more than 25 years of marketing communications and journalism expertise. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in communications from UC-Berkeley and a Master...

[View full biography](#)