

## Augmented Reality: An imminent leap forward

Written by Mark Logan

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Every time I start to explain the concept of Augmented Reality, people get this knowing smile on their faces and insinuate something about illicit pharmaceuticals. But snide remarks have done nothing to dampen my enthusiasm for this emerging technology. As a technophile and marketer, I see Augmented Reality as an imminent leap forward in our ability to use technology to enhance our lives.

What is Augmented Reality?



Mark Logan is an interactive marketing and branding interests. He got to work in a broad cross-section

Simply put, Augmented Reality is the blending of computer data or images with real, physical spaces. Think of the heads-up display in a military jet, where computer data is projected onto a view of real-world images in real time.

A little closer to home, another simple example of augmented reality is the first down lines shown on broadcast football games or the moving, world-record lines shown at the swimming competitions at the Olympics this year. It's just a computer-generated graphic overlaid on video of a real-world event.

Now, imagine that rather than being constrained by a billion dollar cockpit or even a television set, you could carry an augmented reality display device with you wherever you went, and see an overlay of data on top of the real world no matter where you are. Maybe a small, pocket-sized device with an embedded camera and a computer chip? Anyone know where I can get one of those?

My Curiosity Kindled

I started thinking about this topic before I knew its name. A few months ago, I was on vacation in San Francisco. Trying out my new iPhone and a bunch of location-aware applications, I began to appreciate the iPhone's ability to give me access to all the hidden data about my real-world surroundings. I could imagine a scenario where I would automatically gain access to reviews, ratings, comments and background information about the buildings and businesses around me, just by firing up my phone and pointing the camera in their direction. I thought of this tool as something like secret decoder glasses giving me access to meta data for the real world. **When Real and Virtual Worlds Collide**

A couple of months later, I attended the Virtual Worlds Conference in Los Angeles, and sat in on a panel discussion about Augmented Reality. I realized that they were talking about the concept that had been bouncing around in my brain since vacation.

Turns out, I'm far from alone in being excited about the potential applications of this technology, and in fact there is a wealth of demos, prototypes, installations and other experimental or alpha stage work in this space. So for those of you as new to this idea as I am, here are some samples to whet your appetite.

Meta Data for Navigation

Enkin is a proof-of-concept demo that shows navigation data overlaid on a Google phone prototype.

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[Enkin](#) from [Enkin](#) on [Vimeo](#) .

### Virtual Graffiti

Augmented Reality can take many forms, not all of it will be utilitarian, some of it will be artistic.

### Augmented Reality Games

I expect to see a rash of injuries caused by people playing AR games and not paying attention to where they are going while running down the street . . .

. . . or worse yet, driving their cars.

### Augmented Reality in Museums and Historic Sites

Hopefully we'll be a bit safer strolling around sedate tourist destinations and museums, as in this AR display of computer-generated characters in Pompeii in an installation called Lifeplus.



### Augmented Reality and Product Display

And finally, a commercial example that you can imagine coming to a toy store near you very soon.

I found most of these examples on a couple of great blogs, so I'll give them a shout out here. Both are good sources of info for Augmented Reality goodies.

[Augmented Reality Blog](#)  
[Games Alfresco](#)

I intend to write more about this technology and what it can mean to marketers in the upcoming years, but I'll stake my meager reputation as a prognosticator on the fact that you're going to be hearing and seeing a lot of this meme in the near future.

I'll leave you with this little indication of how close at hand this phenomena is. Nokia recently announced its Point and Find technology will be launching in a few months. Keep an eye on this and expect iPhones and Google phones to follow suit very quickly.