

It's Too Risky for Brands to Stay on the Sidelines of Augmented Reality

It'll be as ubiquitous as the internet

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An interview with:
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Augmented reality (AR) has existed in one form or another since 2008. Every so often, a brand or technology provider releases an application or makes an announcement that reignites the AR hype. Until now, that excitement has always gradually faded away, only to be temporarily rekindled by the next big announcement.

But Keith Soljacich, vice president of experiential technology at global marketing and technology agency Digitas, is one of the many ad agency executives and tech providers who believes AR's big moment is finally here. Soljacich spoke with eMarketer's Caroline Cakebread about what a brand's presence could look like in an augmented world, and why it's imperative for brands to be proactive about AR.

eMarketer:

AR has been around for about 10 years, why are consumers and marketers just now getting excited about it?

Keith Soljacich:

The people who make and create AR are getting consumers excited about the possibility of AR on a mass scale. Consumers are using and trialing it, but I don't know if the excitement goes the other way, and consumers are seeking out AR utilities or entertainment.

We are still in the generation of AR as a shiny object and not as an essential channel for ROI [return on investment]. It's mostly being used for adding value to branded experiences, and if it does relate back to ROI, it requires the extra step of browsing a website. There's no full end-to-end channel yet.

“When AR takes off, your digital presence will be everywhere and it will become your product.”

eMarketer:

If it's just a shiny object, should marketers still be thinking about it?

Keith Soljacich:

I think of AR and a brand's presence in AR similar to the way we thought of the internet 15 years ago. People back then had a hard time understanding why their brand needed a website and were asking questions like, 'What good is it going to do for me?' and 'What return on investment am I getting?'

If 15 years ago you could have asked your future self if you needed a website, you would say yes, absolutely—what are you waiting for? I see the same trend right now, because ultimately, when we get to generation five or six, brands that sit on the sidelines and wait too long may get passed up by those that jump in early.

eMarketer:

Can you give an example of what a brand's presence in AR would look like?

Keith Soljacich:

We talk a lot about AR and the contextual brand. When AR takes off, your digital presence will be everywhere and it will become your product. For example, take a KitchenAid stand mixer. Sitting on a shelf, you can learn quite a bit about it, but when you apply an AR layer to that stand mixer, the product comes to life. You can see it work and interact with it, or change the colors and try different attachments.

I'm a believer that the AR Cloud represents the same type of opportunity that networked internet did back in the late 1980s, early 1990s.

eMarketer:

Can you explain what the AR Cloud is?

Keith Soljacich:

Essentially, it's duplicating our real environment by scanning the world and turning it into an interactive layer. For example, right now, it would be like if you were going to pull something up and learn about it by Googling it. In addition to the data, there would be the actual physical manifestation of the world—a real presence.

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eMarketer:

Where does VR fit into the context of the AR Cloud as you see it?

Keith Soljacich:

In terms of use and scale, AR is going to bypass VR exponentially—we won't think of AR as a channel but more so just core to everything we do. Whether it's mapping or finding information, there's much more volume to the AR experience. We'll have 10 or 20 AR experiences a day, and VR is still going to be like your TV or Playstation console where you're choosing to sit down and play the game.

eMarketer:

Where do you think AR will be in five years?

Keith Soljacich:

In five years, I absolutely think we will have a virtualized version of our real world. The big game changer will be the combination of AR and computer image recognition with geolocation awareness. Whether we still use our smartphones or head-mounted AR displays, the concept of entering text to get information is going to change to pointing your camera at something you want to learn about and retrieving the information that way. There will be a shift from text entry to more visual entry.

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