

# Augmented Reality Ecommerce



Since the 1980s, virtual reality has tantalized us with visions of [digital futures](#) in which real life is supplemented with a new way of living. Computer-generated worlds that offer views into new experiences were the future.

That future only sort of arrived, as only the arrival of Web3 technologies have brought VR more into the mainstream. It's still fairly nascent, but VR has reached the point where it is evolving, with augmented reality becoming the newest and most proven shoulder technology to emerge.

Unlike VR, AR technology builds on the world around you, enabling real life to include digital elements. For [ecommerce](#) and online shopping, this means new opportunities, like allowing customers to see how [clothes](#) look on them with virtual try-ons or seeing how furniture fits in their home, like IKEA Place. It also means greater conversion rates.

It's a new technology and a growing market — [66 percent of shoppers are interested in using AR](#) as part of their buying decision — and has yet to mature. However, for online retailers that invest now, it represents a new and more intimate ecommerce experience.

# How is Augmented Reality Different from Virtual Reality?

While VR lives in its own world on a server, AR is a layer placed on top of the physical world. Though connected and both offering immersive experiences, they are distinctly their own environments.

## **VR is fully immersive, while AR simply augments the real world.**

VR drops users into an entirely new world, artificially constructed and free to build whatever the owner desires.

In contrast, AR uses the surrounding world — like with Pokemon Go — to build on top of what is already there. It's still an artificial creation, but one that “lives” in the material world.

## **Augmented reality is more portable, while virtual reality requires equipment.**

AR is easier to access, because all you need is a phone. Many common apps that leverage AR are intended to work with devices most carry in our pockets and using them is fairly simple.

VR, however, requires a full headset and independent computing power to work. It's not mobile at all, confining the user to a small area.

## **More people have the capability to experience AR than VR.**

Related, the accessibility means that far more use AR than VR on a regular, or even semi-regular basis. The limited technology requirements mean that AR can be accessed by billions more. VR is still difficult to access and requires significant investments in technology, making it more of a niche platform.

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# Types of AR Applications

While the full uses of AR haven't been fully fleshed out, there have been a few use cases that have proven viable, especially during the pandemic. They are also proving to be viable for online store needs.

## Marker-based AR.

Marker-based AR, also known as Image Recognition or Recognition-based AR, detects an object (the "marker") in front of the camera and provides information about the object on the screen.

When a device using the AR application detects that marker, the app replaces the marker on the screen with a 3D model of the corresponding object, enabling the user to view the object from multiple angles.

## Markerless AR.

Unlike marker-based AR, markerless doesn't need a specific object to be used. Rather, users can place a virtual object wherever they please and manipulate the view from there.

## Location-based AR.

Location-based AR takes markerless and applies geolocation to ensure that virtual items can only appear in specific places.

## Projection-based AR.

This involves projecting synthetic light into the physical world. Sometimes, users are able to interact with it similarly to what happens in science fiction movies.

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# How Ecommerce Businesses Are Using Augmented Reality

AR enables customers to have a deeper understanding of their purchase by allowing them to experience products before buying them. This “try it, then buy it” formula creates a stronger connection with products without having to physically see them.

## Virtual clothes and accessories try-on.

Clothes are a deeply personal purchase and — literally — there is no one size fits all solution. Buyers want the right product — for them. What that is varies from person to person.

Shoppers want to get a better idea of how an item will look on them before purchasing, which is obviously difficult on an ecommerce platform. If they do buy a new product and the item doesn't fit right, they return it, placing a greater burden on the seller.

AR helps online shoppers understand what they're buying and how the items will work for them in virtual showrooms. There have been successful launches of applications for clothing, accessories and eyeglasses.

## Beauty brands AR.

Makeup and beauty brands like Sephora have emerged as a major market for AR. The ability to see what different tones or colors look like on a person brings the in-store experience to the home.

From blush to lipstick to hair colors, buyers are able to easily sample products to determine what works for them and what doesn't.

## AR Gamification.

It's not enough to create an additional world. Users need to have something to do in it. Hence, ecommerce companies are building games within these worlds to provide entertainment and a reason to return to the application.

Pokemon Go was the first mainstream AR platform success and provides a template for others to follow.

## Preview product placement.

What will that couch really look like in your living room? How big will that television screen appear on your wall? It can be difficult to tell even when you're at the store looking at the

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physical item — never mind looking at it on a small computer or mobile screen.

Preview placement gives customers a real-time glimpse of what a product will look like when placed in their own environment and is a mainstream example of how augmented reality technology is being adopted.

### **Interactive user manuals.**

Interactive user manuals bring learning off the page into the real (or virtual) world. In an AR world, users learning how to use a product get greater insights by working with an AR-created version of the product they're using. Some of the complexity is stripped away when users learn on a 3D representation of a product instead of a 2D diagram.

### **Social media filters.**

Anyone using Snapchat or Instagram is likely familiar with these AR filters. It's a unique way to build customer engagement and have a brand stand out in a cluttered market.

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# Augmented Reality Can Help Grow Your Store

Mimicking the in-store experience in a digital environment is difficult, but AR helps bridge that gap. By replicating physical items digitally, ecommerce websites are deepening the engagement with the customer and increasing the chances of completing a sale.

## **Drive personalization.**

AR creates experiences that are unique to each person. Many may use the same AR functionality, but everyone will experience it differently. That creates engagements that are special and authentic.

## **Increase customer engagement.**

AR is one the “bells and whistles” that encourage customers to spend more time on a site — and the more time they spend, the more likely they are to make a purchase. Even if they don’t buy, they’ve had a memorable experience and are more likely to return.

## **Can drive upsell.**

AR helps get customers in the door, where ecommerce sites have opportunities to expose them to additional buying opportunities. Think of AR as the flashing neon sign that helps a brick-and-mortar store stand out from those around it.

## **Reach new customers.**

It’s a noisy environment to sell in. Creating new and engaging AR experiences is a good way to rise above it and attract new eyes.

## **Reduce returns.**

AR gives customers a deeper understanding of a product and how it will work with their unique needs. That deeper understanding means higher conversion rates, they’re more likely to get the product they need most and are less likely to return it.

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# How to Bring AR to Your Ecommerce Store

Launching AR functionality should not be done without careful consideration. There should be clear goals and understanding of what it will take to launch and what your company is looking to gain from it.

## Clarify your business objectives.

What do you want to achieve? And how does it help your customers? Make sure you don't stop after answering the first question, because the second question can take your AR application from good to great. You need to understand exactly what you want the customer experience to achieve.

## Identify augmented reality tools you would like to use.

The greater adoption of AR apps has increased the number of tools on the market. To help wade through the options, use these considerations:

- **Capabilities:** Do you need a robust system with deep functionality or something lighter?
- **Supported devices:** The tool should work on most widely-used mobile devices and desktop.
- **Supported operating systems:** Expanding on the above, it should work with all commonly-used OSs.

## Market your new tool.

Making the tool is just the first step. Next, you must spread the word. Leverage social media, email campaigns and other traditional channels. Create a demo video that shows how the tool works and why customers should use it.

Finally, make it easy to share so your customers can do some of the marketing work for you.

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## The Final Word

The full uses of AR have not been flushed out, but the technology's potential and use cases for ecommerce companies are intriguing. One of the challenges for digital stores is to recreate the in-store experience.

AR takes major steps towards accomplishing this. Additional uses will emerge as the technology matures, but AR has the potential of being “must have” for ecommerce sites in the future.

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# FAQs About Augmented Reality Ecommerce

## Are shoppers really adopting AR?

Yes and increasingly so. According to one study, 71% of consumers would shop more often if they used AR and 61% prefer retailers with AR experiences.

## What are the benefits for retailers using AR on social media platforms?

AR opens up opportunities for new social commerce channels. Using tools like makeup filters on Instagram or virtually trying on clothes through Snapchat are new customer contact points and chances to make a sale.

## How can AR help retailers increase conversions and decrease return rates?

AR creates deeper connections with products that traditional web experiences can't replicate. Seeing how a couch fits in a room takes guesswork out of the purchase decision and gives the buyer greater confidence that what they're buying will fit their needs.

## How should I promote my AR tool after it's been developed?

Leveraging social media, influencers and other traditional digital channels are most effective. Traditional marketing campaigns that use print — using a QR code — can even work. If an application is used in conjunction with a specific location, QR codes posted around the area will drive users to check the tool out.

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