

Getting your brand ready for augmented reality

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Date : August 11, 2016



Creative technologist and Asia-Pacific head of AR provider Zappar reveals why brands need to start getting serious about their AR marketing strategy and content

In the past year, there's been an augmented reality explosion as more brands embrace the technology offerings to boost customer engagement and create a buzz around their products.

Loreal's [Makeup Genius](#), Pepsi's '[blippable](#)' product labels, Ebay's new [virtual store](#) in partnership with Myer are just a handful of examples showing how brands are adopting AR as a significant part of their marketing mix. And the exponential popularity of AR-enabled mobile game, [Pokemon Go](#), is proof that people are more than ready to embrace this new and exciting space.

"The director of the *Life of Pi* put it perfectly when he was asked why he shot the film principally in 3D: He said we see the world in 3D, so why shouldn't we be telling our stories in 3D," creative technologist and the Asia-Pacific head of AR provider Zappar, David Francis, told CMO. "From a brand perspective, this approach just makes so much more sense to us."

Having been in the AR game for more than five years, Francis said the success of AR is not about the technology itself, but about generating great content.

"If you look at augmented reality games right now and companies like Magic Leap and all the acquisitions made by **Apple**, **Facebook** and **Google**, it's huge," he said. "But a lot of that is around hardware and software. Now while that's all awesome and it forms the architecture and infrastructure for us moving on computing as we currently know it, the big thing I believe is missing is understanding how to create effective content."

According to Francis, people have historically tried to blame the technology for a lack of engagement, or shoehorn the AR space into a sort of programmatic platform, using existing video content online and repurposing it.

"But if consumers get to the other side and the content isn't exclusive in a way that is great for the AR space, people feel let down," he said.

“So when people ask, does AR even work, I say well if you put out a bad TVC, it totally doesn’t work. People will watch it once and turn off halfway through. It’s the same with AR: If you don’t put compelling content on the other side, then people won’t come back to your offering.”

In the retail space, such as Ebay’s new virtual store, where AR content involves converting textiles and flexible garments into 3D, Francis admitted there have traditionally been limitations, making it a manual process.

“But there is much better scanning technology coming in and you will also see phones coming out in the next year with multiple cameras and infra-red built into them, so we can create 3D artifacts more easily and quickly,” he said.

“In terms of the user experience, it’s a trade-off between having the 2D photo realism, which is what we’re used to, and actually having a spatial understanding of the scale and shape which we can imagine wearing or as an object in our home.”

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Brands serious about remaining competitive and relevant need to start getting their AR content organised, Francis claimed. To do this, he advised marketers to think about creating 3D repositories for their brands.

“You may already have 3D content used in CGI or TV ads, so it’s a matter of gathering all those 3D assets and understanding that the next interface is going to be so much about 3D, it’s important to start preparing now,” he said.

Zappar is also looking to make content creation easier for brands who are serious about adding AR to their marketing mix, and recently rolled out a set of AR and VR tools called ZapWorks. To date, the company has produced campaigns for the likes of **Rovio/Angry Birds, Coca Cola, PEZ and Warner Brothers.**

In addition to AR creation, ZapWorks supports the creation of VR experiences for devices such as Google Cardboard, and Francis expected the two technologies will increasingly be presented together.

“With this next wave of mobile occurring, we need to re-imagine what is possible and create more immersive content that is made for this new canvas – even extending beyond AR to short-form VR,” Francis added.

“Our mission is to truly democratise AR for the first time and we are letting the entire ZapWorks suite loose.”

This article first appeared in www.cmo.com.au