

Virtual Reality Takes a Front Seat!

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StubHub Will Use Virtual Reality to Let You Preview Your Seat

Like many companies, **eBay** is convinced virtual reality is the next big thing. But also like a lot of companies, **eBay** is trying to figure out just what that means for its business.

On Thursday, the company is announcing its first small foray into the VR arena, as subsidiary **StubHub** offers Final Four ticket buyers the option to get an immersive, 3-D view of available seats. A similar option will also appear for those looking to purchase baseball tickets for **AT&T** Park, home of the San Francisco Giants.

The experience will work from within the existing StubHub apps for iOS and Android. Customers will have the option of either using a smartphone or tablet and rotating it around to see different views, or popping their phone into a VR headset like **Google** Cardboard or Gear VR for a more immersive view.

“We didn’t want to do something just for fun or [as] a marketing gimmick,” said **Marcus Shelksohn**, **StubHub’s** head of product for mobile apps. Being able to see what the view is like solves a real problem for customers, he said. “Are those seats that are closer to the court really worth the extra \$50?”

StubHub isn't alone, with other online ticket sellers, teams and venues also working to offer interactive seat maps using virtual reality.

Rival Rukkus, for example, is working on offering would-be seat buyers a chance to view potential seats using immersive panoramic photography. **StubHub**, meanwhile, has opted for 3-D renderings over actual photography.

StubHub executives said the renderings offer a cleaner, smoother and potentially less costly to produce method to give ticket buyers a preview of their seats.

Devin Wenig, eBay's CEO, says VR has been overhyped for a long time, but he has grown convinced that it is more than just a passing fad.

"It is not a feature; it is a platform," he said.

However, figuring out just what it means for an online marketplace is less clear. Wenig said the largest opportunity for **eBay** is probably in high-priced categories like cars, antiques, paintings and fashion, where getting a close-up view matters more than on commodity purchases.

"The plan is to start to attack some of those more emotionally driven categories where the trust gap is hard to bridge," he said.

The **StubHub** experiment — and Wenig said it is just that — won't be **eBay's** last, with other endeavors planned for the core brand. The initial VR effort, which offers maps of Houston's NRG Stadium and **AT&T** Park, was put together in a few weeks by fewer than a dozen people.

Additional reporting by Jason Del Rey.

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