



What is Augmented Reality?

By

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When I was at the Inman technology conference in August, the subject of Augmented Reality was being bandied around during the technology sessions and I thought it time to have a look at how it will impact not only the working real estate agent but also the consumer.

Firstly, what is Augmented Reality? The concept has been around since the early 90's, but it's really only been in the last 12 months that the technical world has gone ga ga over it and if not for the onslaught of Twitter, you'd probably have heard a lot more about it by now. So here is the technical explanation for what it is:

Augmented reality (AR) is a term for a live direct or indirect view of a physical real-world environment whose elements are merged with (or augmented by) virtual computer-generated imagery - creating a mixed reality. The augmentation is conventionally in real-time and in semantic context with environmental elements, like for example sports scores on TV during a match. With the help of advanced AR technology (e.g. adding computer vision and object recognition) the information about the surrounding real world of the user becomes interactive and digitally usable. Artificial information about the environment and the objects in it can be stored and retrieved as an information layer on top of the real world view.

Ok, there it is, simple really, but what does it do and how can you use it in your real estate business. The easiest way to explain how the technology will work is this, Imagine a consumer being able to stop in front of a house for sale and simply point their smart phone at the house and within seconds being able to view as well as save all the information about the listing. From there the consumer can look at the pictures, watch a video, email the information and even contact the agent direct.

To watch the technology in action you can visit the web site of Layer, an Android-based application that uses your handset's GPS location, digital compass and accelerometer to call up geotagged information and superimpose it on the world around you.

The iPhone application for this technology is now available for download from the iTunes store, so you can imagine the potential this has for the future, and it's not just real estate that will benefit.

Any business can and will benefit from this technology, lets imagine you're walking down a street looking for a good place to eat, you hold up your mobile phone so the screen shows what's in front of you. What you see are things you couldn't see before, brightly coloured markers that show restaurants and bars, turn the corner and you'll see the new view on your screen, click on any of the markers and you'll see customer reviews, menu and price information. This is just a small part of what this technology can do, so I hope I've opened the door just a little for you.

There's one lesson in this for the real estate industry, don't get left behind, make sure you keep up with developments and new technology such as this as it emerges. Your very future may well depend on it.

Author Mike Andrew is a technology consultant to small business and operates a web consultancy that covers areas such SEO, social media strategy and Internet marketing.

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