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With Stores Shut, 3D Visualization Is Playing a Bigger Role in Mobile & E-**Commerce Conversion**

By Madeleine Streets



Visitors use an application on their mobile phones to access an augmented reality (AR) program.

CREDIT: CJ GUNTHER/EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Virtual technologies like 3D imaging and augmented reality (AR) were gaining traction throughout 2019, but adoption is rapidly increasing in 2020. Store closures have increased retailers' reliance on e-commerce — and on tools that can mimic an in-store product experience.

"For footwear in particular, consumers want to touch and feel the product and often view it against specific outfits," said Dale Bathum, president at Expivi, a 3D configuration plug-in for e-commerce. "Consumers find enjoyment in their ability to interact with products online. The product comes to life by spinning, focusing, expanding views and easily switching between color options."

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This interactive experience has material benefits for conversion. Expivi reports that its footwear partners see an average engagement increase of 30% and a 12% increase in conversion rate. The COVID-19 pandemic has spiked additional growth as customers flock to e-commerce channels, with Expivi users seeing 20% more engagement in 3D sessions.

Brands can also leverage 3D technology to support their wholesale process. Just as customers gain greater visualization and knowledge of a product through a 3D image, buyers are able to view merchandise; test skews and build their assortments; and then use those 3D files on their own e-commerce channels, through the Expivi platform.

This is proving particularly valuable as buyers are unable to travel and assess samples in person, due to pandemic-induced travel restrictions. But Bathum believes this value will extend to the post-coronavirus landscape, due to the cost benefits of eliminating physical samples and travel from the buying process.

Matthew Klimpke, co-founder and CEO of 3D and AR platform Vyking, agrees on the long-term benefits of introducing visualization technology now. Vyking helps its customers provide a virtual try-on experience through their mobile apps, which allows shoppers to gain a more accurate view of a product before purchase. It offers a footwear-specific tool.

"Consumer behavior was already changing before COVID-19; now we're having an acceleration — and it's not going back," said Klimpke. "So if you want to stay alive or thrive in the post-COVID world of e-commerce, you need to think about 3D. You need to think about augmented reality, because these are the tools that let people shop at home."

Vyking partnered with Poizon, a leading footwear e-commerce platform in China, at the beginning of 2020, and the marketplace now reports 100,000 daily engagements with the AR module, as well as an "add to basket" of three times the average rate. These sales have all occurred during China's pandemic outbreak, demonstrating the added value of 3D visualization right now.

It's not just conversion that has been impacted. These tools have also reduced the return rate for participating brands, with Expivi reporting a decrease of 12%. This reduction is particularly useful for companies struggling to manage inventory and shipping logistics, due to the strain of COVID-19 restrictions. But it could also translate to significant long-term cost savings: The footwear returns market is forecast to be \$27 billion by 2024, with 20% of this due to style errors, according to research by Shopify.

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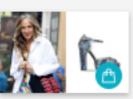
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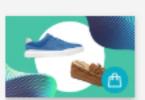
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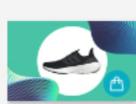
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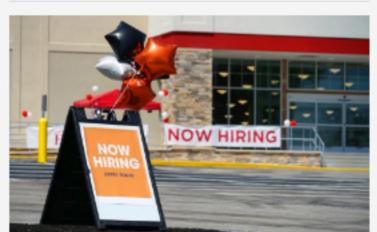
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