Retail Innovation Shout Out: IKEA Brings Virtual Reality to Life for Shoppers

by Traci Stapleton

The toughest part of furniture shopping is often attempting to visualize how the piece will look once it's out of the showroom and in your own home or office. No matter how comfortable or functional the piece, if you have doubts about how it will look, feel, or fit in your space, you may not be willing to risk making a big purchase.

But what if you didn’t have to rely on imagination alone to visualize that couch in your living room? Or, better yet, what if you didn’t need a mental image at all, and instead could see a REAL image, complete with your room setting and the actual piece of furniture?

Global retailer IKEA is making this dream a reality, and making serious strides in innovating the consumer shopping experience with their latest 2014 catalog. Shoppers position the catalog -- which is embedded with Augmented Retail (AR) technology features -- in the place where they would potentially position the furniture piece. The shopper then scans the catalog with the AR app on their smartphone or tablet, and chooses the selected item. Using a photo the shopper takes of the space with their mobile device, the AR app overlays the selected furniture piece into the scene.

Reducing the risks or unknowns of large ticket item decision making removes a major hurdle in closing the sale. Further, personalizing the shopping experience by incorporating the shopper’s own space into the process increases customer commitment to buy. The power of IKEA’s innovation changes how we shop for furniture, and makes imagination something you can actually see.

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