FOUNDATIONS AND FUTURE OF AUGMENTED REALITY AND ECOMMERCE
How augmented reality will impact online retail
01 A BRIEF HISTORY ON AR IN RETAIL p.08
09 Retail Giants Leveraging Augmented Reality

02 INNOVATION IN ONLINE RETAIL p.13
14 Milestones of Ecommerce Innovation
22 What’s in Store for the Future of Retail?

03 AUGMENTED REALITY FOR RETAIL p.24
24 The Challenges of AR
28 Revolutionizing the Buyer’s Journey
34 The Advantages of Augmented Commerce
For too long, augmented reality (AR) has been considered a novel technology. Yet beyond the hype of Pokémon Go and Snapchat, the engaging experience of AR can actually drive business goals, specifically in the ever-evolving retail industry.

Despite the revenue opportunities that come with online retail, there are also some daunting challenges that companies must overcome in order to successfully sell products online.

Retailers across all markets, realizing the opportunity in eCommerce, have begun to prioritize their online storefronts, but the experience of mobile commerce still faces many hurdles. Many vendors have yet to create engaging, timely experiences throughout the buyer’s journey.

“Mobile shoppers overtake desktop visitors to reach 61% of the total eCommerce traffic. But conversions are still 63% lower for mobile when compared to desktop”, according to a 2016 mobile commerce study from Unbxd. Augmented reality is the new-age innovation that is filling this gap, already providing real benefits for both retailers and shoppers. AR is set to become a differentiating tool among retail competition, providing true value in the areas of consumer engagement, conversion, and reduced return rates.

Augmented reality is a technology that layers virtual objects or holograms on top of the existing environment in real time. Although most brands
see AR as a future innovation, it’s already delivering results for online shopping, specifically on mobile. Innovation in eCommerce is quickly advancing, and augmented reality is in a position to bring a physical presence to online shopping.

71% of shoppers would shop at a retailer more often if they offered augmented reality.
– The Impact of AR on Retail, Retail Perceptions

The rapid evolution of eCommerce has created a new sales channel for retailers that is giving brick-and-mortar stores a run for their money. Ninety-four percent of retail sales are still generated in brick-and-mortar stores, but the growth of eCommerce sales aren’t far behind in their impact. eCommerce has been not only profitable for business but also convenient and pleasing for consumers. As of mid-2016, eCommerce sales in the US totaled over $97 billion, representing nearly 16% year-over-year growth, according to the US Department of Commerce. Even within eCommerce, growing mobile trends are shaping the approach of many retail merchants. The lion’s share of mCommerce (mobile commerce) growth stems from smartphones, which nearly doubled in the US in 2015 to $39.40 billion – amounting to a 95.8% year-over-year increase, according to eMarketer.
Even then, smartphone conversion rates are much lower than those of desktop. Why? There are a couple factors to which retail insiders attribute this disparity between desktop and mobile conversion rates:

**Intent** – With the majority of eCommerce sales being performed through desktop devices, consumers who shop on mobile more frequently have an intent to browse catalogues rather than buy.

**Mobile friction** – Most mobile devices weren’t intended for online shopping, and the smaller screens and (often) slower load times make it difficult for users to complete their purchasing decisions as easily, especially when it comes to entering information and comparing products. This often results in cart abandonment.

Still, the primary drawback to online shopping is that many of the sensory elements that customers use to make their purchasing decisions are often lost. When shopping online, a customer cannot touch or feel an item, see how it works, or know how it will fit in his or her home. The loss of this interactivity and presence in the shopping experience leads
to uncertain buyers and more abandoned carts. Thankfully, the growing presence of augmented reality in retail can potentially springboard retailers over these hurdles. Although many brands believe that augmented reality is an innovation of the future, it's providing businesses value right now. Let's discover its applications and how forward-thinking retailers are using AR to their advantage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONVERSION RATES BY DEVICE</th>
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<td>Despite the growth of mobile shopping, conversions still lag significantly behind desktop.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Conversion Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>1.16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>3.65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tablet</td>
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(Global conversion rates by device - Monetate 2015)
Augmented reality provides distinct advantages within retail for brands, retailers, and consumers alike. Here we will explore a brief history of AR in retail.

The synergy between the retail industry and this ground-breaking technology is not as futuristic as we may think. Consumers’ needs and consistent pain points are already being aided with augmented reality.

The benefits of online shopping are growing. As an online shopper, one has access to a variety of luxuries: product reviews, payment services, and product configurations, just to name a few. Now that the digital medium and in-store experience must work in tandem to create a cohesive experience, technology like augmented reality is allowing retailers to offer a more personal, interactive journey for buyers that will change the way we shop forever.

Today, many retailers are leveraging augmented reality to bring the digital experience to physical, in-store products as well as to stimulate online engagement to drive sales and customer satisfaction.
Retail Giants Leveraging Augmented Reality

**Lego**

Low consumer confidence is a big contributor to high rates of abandoned purchases. AR is helping overcome this point of friction for in-store purchases. CPGs and brands are enabling AR experiences from the outside of their packaging. Shoppers can scan the product packaging and easily see what’s offered inside without having to speculate.

Lego implemented AR into their in-store marketing strategy with AR-powered kiosks and product boxes. Customers use the kiosk to scan the box of the Lego kit they are considering purchasing, and they can then show their children exactly what the finished product will look like – in 3D.
Converse
Converse uses innovative technology to show shoppers how shoes will look on their own feet. With their AR-fueled Converse Sampler app, the customer can select any shoe from the Converse catalog and simply point the phone towards his or her foot to see how the (virtual) shoe will look.

Even more, this app supports purchases, so the customer can have the full retail experience of browsing, trying on shoes, and making a purchase all through the power of AR.
IKEA

IKEA's continued success is due in part to their ability to leverage technology through their eCommerce channels for consumers. In 2013, IKEA created an AR catalog app to help customers visualize how certain pieces of furniture would fit and look in their very own homes. Customers can then select different items from the IKEA catalog to see how the finished, assembled piece of furniture will look in their home before they purchase.

IKEA’s visionary retail campaign performed well, as it helped mitigate common objections that furniture shoppers often have when making the decision to purchase: Will it fit in my living room? Will this look okay in my bedroom? Augmented reality for retail is helping customers answer these questions themselves, thus raising a positive excitement about their purchase.
Today's consumers can engage with a brand through a physical store, on their online shop or mobile presence, or through social media. All of these experiences should be consistent and should act as an extension of one another. Augmented reality has already been used to create a true omnichannel retail experience that establishes an engaging buyer’s journey both online and off. As the relationship between AR and retail continues to mature, augmented reality will have an impact on every stage of the process.

So, how did we get here? And by we, I mean the retail industry. In the past, the extent of personalization on online marketplaces was peer-to-peer product reviews. Now, personalization is the norm. Consumers of all generations are expecting these experiences when shopping online. The basic personalized interactions – displaying related items on an online store or ad retargeting – are expected by shoppers. Augmented reality is quickly proving to be the next wave in customer personalization, as it is the best way to visualize products being sold online.

To continue building an engaging experience in a way that provides value to both sides, augmented reality is the tool that will differentiate retailers in the coming year.
One of the greatest luxuries of the Internet is instant access. The worldwide web has changed the way we work, the way we socialize, and the way we shop – forever.

Over the past decade, the evolution of eCommerce has been marked by various milestones. Just as the Internet has grown into the desired medium for marketing, advertising, and purchasing of goods and services, eCommerce has grown to rival traditional shopping in many ways.

Led by tech giants like Amazon, who joined the space in 1995, and later Google and PayPal, who launched their eCommerce initiatives in 1998, the growth of online shopping is far from finished. The disrupters of eCommerce have undoubtedly accelerated in the last decade.

“With the increasing shift in mobile commerce, it’s only a natural progression to incorporate augmented reality into experiences that shoppers have on their mobile devices during their path-to-purchase.”

– Jeff Papows, CEO ShopAdvisor
Milestones of eCommerce Innovation

The most impactful changes in the eCommerce realm in the last ten years include the rise of online marketplaces, mobile commerce, digital marketing, and now augmented reality. Walk through the development of eCommerce from its early beginnings to where it stands today.

**Online Marketplaces**

In the past ten years, online marketplaces have become the most popular places for product vendors to sell, marketers to advertise, and consumers to shop.

While many popular retail stores and brands offer online shopping, the growth of online marketplaces such as Amazon have changed how people consume, with added layers of convenience and confidence.

Amazon led the way by launching their mobile commerce site as early as 2001, and they continue to lead innovation in the eCommerce market with initiatives such as drone delivery, among others.

By accessing an online marketplace, consumers can find a range of product offerings that fit their search. They can compare prices and brands, read customer reviews, and often purchase products at below-retail prices. In 2006, Google released Google Checkout to help ease the pay-
ment process for eCommerce shoppers purchasing items online through multiple retailers.

Now there are new players who are dominating the competitive world of online retail. Jet.com is an online marketplace that became popular among the millennial crowd with their very competitive pricing. Walmart announced their decision to acquire Jet.com in 2016, which added a valuable eCommerce and distribution arm to the retailer powerhouse. Boxed is another widely used marketplace that allows you to shop for your favorite groceries and household items and get them delivered directly to your home.

In addition to online storefronts, Magento is another retail player that empowers independent eCommerce platforms. As an eCommerce content management system – emerging in 2007 and later getting acquired by eBay in 2011 – Magento is the premier open source retail platform, providing eCommerce extensions for third-party platforms. According to the top 1 million Alexa rankings, Magento still stands tall as the most popular eCommerce platform, with a 26.1% market representation.

The landscape of marketplaces is steadily evolving to cater towards a better, more personalized customer experience.
Mobile-Friendly Purchasing
Perhaps one of the most important evolutions within eCommerce in recent years is the ability to browse, compare, and shop from beautiful, responsive mobile sites or apps via a smartphone or tablet. mCommerce represents a vast majority of people who would now rather experience the full spectrum of the buyer’s journey through the convenience of a device that’s always nearby. People can make purchasing decisions and buy products without ever entering a brick-and-mortar retail location, all from their mobile device.

Even though mobile commerce currently represents 30% of eCommerce sales, it is making large advancements that will increase its stake in the
overall landscape of online shopping (according to Internet Retailer). The number of people who used a phone to pay for products and services has climbed to 9 million US mobile subscribers, a large jump from 2008, according to Unbxd. Yet, many retailers haven’t prioritized their mobile experiences, even with the knowledge of how heavily they impact purchases through other channels.

As app marketplaces began to be developed on Android and iOS, app-based mobile commerce had the opportunity to create much more interactivity and engagement through these platforms. Push notifications are an advantage that mobile shopping apps can utilize in re-engaging their customers and promoting sales. Desktop eCommerce platforms don’t have this luxury outside of email newsletters.
Online and Digital Marketing – Social Shopping

The mobile optimization of eCommerce also impacts how companies connect to consumers and market their products. Most individuals, particularly those in the younger demographic, keep their mobile devices close and handy, so they are much more accessible to marketers and advertisers. Online and digital marketing campaigns have virtually replaced previous methods of advertising, putting products in front of consumers. They also strategically reach shoppers in places where they spend their time online, such as:

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<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Online Games</th>
<th>Apps</th>
<th>Websites</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
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As eCommerce has evolved, online marketing has become seemingly limitless in its potential to reach and persuade consumers throughout their online behavior.

Selling through social media is becoming the standard across several of the bigger social networks.

Twitter’s “Buy Now” buttons are described to brands as a way for customers to discover and purchase products in real time. Instagram enabled actionable advertisements, and their social selling initiatives are only
expected to expand under Facebook’s direction.

According to an Accenture millennial shopping study, 89% of respondents said that “having access to real-time product availability information would influence their shopping choices in terms of which stores they would frequent.”

Retargeting is another common method used by retailers and brands to put their product back in your field of view, such as if you elected to leave their website or were interested in similar items before.

As advertisers strive to reach millennial shoppers, more companies are adapting their online stores to accommodate this audience.

**Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality**

As mixed reality – virtual reality and augmented reality – find their way into the mainstream, they are destined to dominate the future of eCommerce. These interactive environments have brought a sense of realism to online shopping.

In a partnership with Australian retailer Myer, eBay launched the first virtual reality (VR) department store in 2016. Shoppers can now look through thousands of Myer products through their VR headset.
Instead of using hand controllers, eBay users can select items using only sight. The company has coined the term as “eBay Sight Search,” which allows items to be chosen by holding your gaze on a product for a few seconds. This is one of the earliest iterations of shopping through VR, if not the first implemented experience.

Still, augmented reality is proving to be more practical for online shoppers because AR blends virtual elements with your real surroundings.

The integration of AR into eCommerce portals is quickly changing how consumers shop by offering them a much more immersive and personal experience. Before a consumer interacts with the actual product, the online shopping experience influences and dictates buying decisions. Shopping online inevitably involves a bit of guesswork from a consumer,
which can lead to lost revenue through increased return rates. In fact, according to research conducted by the National Retail Federation, merchandise returns in the US represent nearly $260.5 billion of the retail market.

Online, shoppers are merely guessing how a new bed or a new desk would look in their home; many consumers probably won’t even progress past the browsing phase due to the uncertainty of the online purchase. However, with AR-powered apps, a customer can select furniture pieces they would like to consider, and then see how those items would look in their own home. Through the smartphone’s camera viewer, the AR app enables a customer to see their potential purchase in real time at scale in their home before making the decision to buy.

This level of intuitive interaction and familiarity addresses the global concerns that all eCommerce retailers face, such as abandoned shopping carts and low mobile conversions.

Augmented reality has limitless potential in the eCommerce space, and top brands are finding innovative ways to leverage this technology within their retail journey to accelerate the sales cycle. Augmented reality mobile solutions like Augment are ushering in the next evolution in experiential online shopping.
What’s in Store for the Future of Retail?

**Omnichannel retail is about sustaining a coherent experience for your customers across all of your outlets.**

Innovation in omnichannel efforts are constantly evolving. Yet many retailers are struggling to create a cohesive strategy that encourages the same shopping experience across all channels, both offline and online. In the world of retail, as eCommerce and online shopping grow to compete with brick-and-mortar sales, the need to have a digital presence through both outlets is becoming a necessity. The future of retail lies in creating an online shopping experience that accommodates consumers while providing the same perks they would get from shopping in store.

Interconnected retail certainly has its advantages on the sales floor, and it’s important to coordinate that approach with the convenience offered through your online store: “Digital interactions influence 36 cents of every dollar spent in a brick & mortar store.” In an effort to create a loyal customer base, it’s important to engage customers online and offline, including mobile.

As mobile commerce grows, merchants still struggle to come close to the conversions of desktop. Even then, desktop still falls victim to worrisome statistics. “$4 trillion in merchandise was abandoned in online shopping carts in 2014,” says RetailNext.
The convenience of shopping online, especially through mobile, faces tough obstacles that innovation hopes to solve in the coming year. For example, with consumer electronics, about 65% of goods are returned with no fault found; often consumers didn’t understand the product, according to Inbound Logistics.

From consumer satisfaction to abandoned carts and returned products, there are countless challenges online merchants seek to overcome.

**Innovation in retail is most useful when it provides value to the brand and buyer seamlessly within the buyer’s journey.**

Technology advances in retail – from social selling and all-in-one POS systems to customer experience features like product recommendations and retargeting – all seek to address these problems. As companies implement these tools to help their business solve these problem areas for consumers, augmented reality is successfully providing value for both retailers and shoppers.
AUGMENTED REALITY IN RETAIL

We have explored the evolution of innovative retail technology, including augmented reality. Now it is time to dive in deeper and highlight the challenges and advantages of using augmented reality in online retail.

The Challenges of AR

Augmented reality comes with a set of prerequisites that new players must be aware of in order to implement a successful AR experience for shoppers.

3D Modeling

Augmented reality is relatively similar to other digital technologies in the sense that it is used primarily through smartphones and is highly engaging for consumers (just ask Snapchat). At the same time, AR differs from other innovations in regards to the content behind the experience. Rather than pure data or traditional media types, augmented reality in retail centers around the use of 3D models. The 3D product models are overlaid in the real world through the mobile device. These 3D models are the content that drives the experience, and they’re usually created by the AR
service provider if the manufacturers don’t have these assets already.

Without high-quality 3D product models, the consumer experience will be subpar; consumers won’t be able to resonate with the virtual product that they’re seeing, and the experience ultimately won’t provide value to either side. Further, loading times on eCommerce platforms are crucial. Every millisecond counts, so it’s important to be efficient in the creation and design of your 3D models. Optimizing models to render in AR is important for creating the best shopper experience.

AR lends itself to providing true value when viewing appliances, electronic goods, or furniture you’re looking to purchase. Augment helps solve buyer uncertainty to avoid abandoned carts and increase conversions for mobile shoppers, regardless of the product being considered. Think about buying a Bluetooth speaker. You might see several different speaker options, all of which seem similar in size on the listing of an eCommerce website, but they all are a wide variety of sizes in reality. An error of appreciation can mean ordering the wrong product and needing to return it, which incurs costs for the vendor. As of now, AR technology is still limited when it comes to visualizing apparel and textiles (curtains, for example), but it suits all online shoppers in their mission to make an informed and confident online purchase.
**Tracking**

An AR experience can be implemented either with or without trackers (also called markers). A “tracker” is a simple sheet of paper (for example, the cover of a retailer’s catalog) with a unique design that the AR application uses to place your 3D model in space and at scale. When the tracker is placed in the camera view of the app, your model automatically attaches to this 2D image.

If you view any 3D model in Augment without a tracker, it will appear on ground level at scale. You can then move the model manually in space with your finger. Trackerless mode is perfect when you want to visualize big objects that are usually on the ground.

Tracking is a huge and important component of a seamless AR experience, although in the near future, most mobile devices will have depth-sensing ability. Beginning with the Lenovo Phab 2 Pro (paired with Google Tango right off the shelf), smartphones will have the ability to map out the space around them, and people can place objects wherever they want as they would a physical item. This technology even opens the way for assisted shopping where product recommendations are made based on the space in question.
**Hardware**

The evolution of augmented reality is coming – fast. To stay ahead of the curve, players will have to adapt to the evolution in AR hardware. Augmented reality is experienced mostly through mobile devices at the moment, but headsets like the Microsoft HoloLens are already reaching early adopters in the professional world – such as developers, retailers, and CPG innovation labs – meaning headset-based experiences are on the horizon.

Keeping up with this developing industry requires constant innovation in software, especially when head-mounted displays begin to compete with the current mobile AR experiences.
It isn’t rare for a customer to start shopping in one channel and end up purchasing through another. A true omnichannel retail approach is about creating a customer experience that is seamless across all mediums. Augmented reality is helping to bridge those gaps by bringing a tangible presence to online shopping.

“

In eCommerce, the average conversion rate is 1.33%, while the top performing online stores convert at a 3.65% rate.

– Via Compass

“
Augmented reality is helping to solve these dilemmas with product visualization. AR makes it possible to see virtual products in your actual environment, and the integration of AR in eCommerce is quickly changing how consumers shop by allowing them to see what they want to buy before any purchase is made.

Even with the knowledge of a product’s dimensions, it’s still challenging to envision how it will look in your home or on your counter beyond a simple eyeball test. Augmented reality is set to revamp the online shopping experience in that sense. What if consumers could see the product in front of them right now? AR is providing value to retailers and shoppers alike in these three areas:
Creating an Engaging Buying Experience

- Retail Perceptions

Keeping shoppers engaged throughout the buyer’s journey is a priority for all retailers, but it’s still a difficult task. Engaging users through augmented reality leads to longer times spent browsing an online store, interacting with products, and testing additional functionality through AR.

Additionally, AR provides true value when it comes to making a purchase decision.

While shopping online, customers have to imagine and interpret what an
item would feel like in their hands or look like in their home. AR technology helps overcome this online buyer’s challenge by transforming imagination into a reality.

A customer who can accurately see how any product will actually feel in his or her environment, at scale, will be able to purchase with more certainty and satisfaction.

“With the increasing shift in mobile commerce, it’s only a natural progression to incorporate augmented reality into experiences that shoppers have on their mobile devices during their path-to-purchase.”

– Jeff Papows, CEO ShopAdvisor
Modifying and Customizing Selections

“77% of shoppers want to use augmented reality to see product differences such as a change in color or style.”

– Retail Perceptions

Before making a purchasing decision, customers often want to see various color selections and explore other modifications that might be available. Historically, customization options have been difficult for online retailers to convey to their consumers.

Augmented reality and computer graphics make it easy for consumers to explore their options and make personalized modifications while shopping online. With retailers who offer augmented reality, shoppers can change the color of furniture they’re looking to buy to see how it looks in their home.

AR has managed to merge the digital element with physical in-store products, and it has stimulated engagement on the sales floor.

Brands are enabling AR images on the outside of their packaging. This allows shoppers to scan the product packaging and easily see what’s offered inside without having to speculate. Many in-store marketing cam-
paigns also offer coupons in this way.

Aside from scannable packaging, AR-powered kiosks are also becoming a large part of the omnichannel approach within brick-and-mortar stores. Customers use these AR stands to scan product boxes and see exactly what the finished product will look like, including other colors and functional configurations.

**Visualizing and Understanding Products and Features**

Both online and in-store, customers want to interact with a product to get a feel of how it works before heading to the checkout. Augmented reality uses animations to allow shoppers to see how complex products like appliances or electronics work and function.

The future of augmented reality in retail will implement augmented reality software development kits (SDKs), like Augment’s SDK, that allows retailers to leverage AR through their own branded platforms.

This is a very exciting field with constant innovation on the horizon, solving today’s problems with the next platform of computing. Online retailers must realize that there is more to VR and AR than mere gaming. As futuristic as these “realities” feel, it’s merely old school all over again – the touch-and-try charm – just virtually!
Augment’s SDK in particular is built to integrate seamlessly into retailers’ existing app or website, allowing them to leverage product visualization to provide value to their shoppers while increasing conversions.

The Advantages of Augmented Commerce

Most, if not all, innovation in retail is made to solve customer doubts and improve internal processes. In the very near future of augmented commerce, augmented reality will provide a different value to retailers, brands, and consumers.

For retailers

There is no doubt AR increases consumer engagement. Thanks to augmented reality, shoppers spend more time visualizing and configuring products in the real world, and they are no longer left with doubts about their online purchases.

- **Increase Conversion Rate**
  No more doubts on size, design, placement

- **Reduce Return Rate**
  No more post-delivery surprises on size, design, placement

- **Improve Brand Image**
  Memorable shopping experience
One of the largest issues in eCommerce is when consumers receive a product that is much different that the one they thought they ordered online. This problem arises because consumers don’t have an effective way to evaluate products online before purchasing. Photos and videos pale in comparison to the familiarity and experience that they get with augmented reality. AR creates an interactive environment between buyers and sellers. In doing so, it establishes an emotional connection between product demand and consumers’ desires. Augmented commerce allows retailers to implement AR within their mobile platform in one seamless experience.

**For Manufacturers**

Brand manufacturers will have a huge stake in the future of augmented commerce. As eCommerce evolves, so will consumer expectations. Product descriptions and 360° photos will no longer suffice. Shoppers will want and expect the ability to test products at home through augmented reality before they buy.

By adding a company’s products to the Augment product database, manufacturers are able to distribute accurate, high-quality 3D product models to their retailers and distributors. The ease of distribution facilitates communication and coordination between brands and retailers. This ensures that retailers and distributors can access and use the best 3D product visualization on their eCommerce channels to drive product sales and engagement.
Augmented reality is combatting buyer uncertainty and its effects unlike any other innovation. Seamless augmented reality product visualization is the next step towards improving the customer shopping experience. Retailers and brands are constantly searching for ways to empower their consumers to better convert with new business models or new technologies. Just as integrated POS systems transformed internal processes, and just as smartphones presented a revolutionary platform for mobile commerce, augmented reality will increase conversions and engage buyers like never before in the future of online retail.
WHO WE ARE

Augment is a venture-backed augmented reality software solution, keen on helping businesses merge their physical and virtual experiences.

Augment was founded in October 2011 and is currently headquartered in Paris, France, with commercial offices in New York City and Orlando, USA. With more than 200 clients in 36 countries, Augment is a leader in the augmented reality space, revolutionizing the entire product life cycle.

Augmented reality is the segue for brands and retailers to create a more meaningful and memorable shopping experience by helping solve the burden of eCommerce through our full software suite and AR SDK.

In the retail industry, Augment removes the guesswork by allowing customers to try the products in augmented reality before buying through their smartphones or tablets. Augment is in a position to bring a physical presence to the online shopping experience. The Augment SDK allows retailers to embed AR product visualization into their existing eCommerce and mobile commerce platforms.

Ready to integrate augmented reality into your eCommerce platform to drive sales and engagement?
Visit our website or contact us here.
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