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With Zappar, Augmented Reality Is Ready for Prime Time

By Tim Bjarin | Oct. 22, 2012 | Add a Comment

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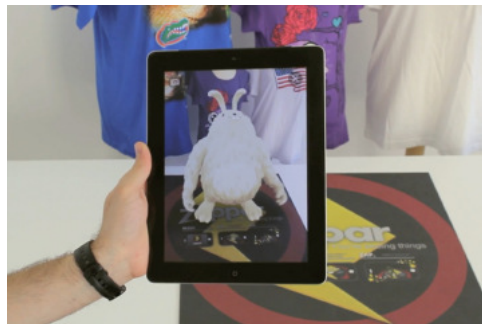
A few weeks back, executives of a U.K. company called **Zappar** came to my office to show me their augmented reality technology. I have been looking into augmented reality for over a decade and have only seen false starts. But for the first time, I finally saw a technology and app infrastructure coming together that suggests to me that augmented reality is finally ready for prime time.

I happened to be in **London** last week for meetings and met again with Casper Thykier, the Managing Director of Zappar and got an even more impressive demo of the technology. And perhaps more importantly, it brought me greater clarification about Zappar's potential impact on games, movies, children's books and advertising.

By definition, augmented reality (AR) is a technology that lets a person view a real-life scene, ad, kids book, game or movie poster, for example, via their mobile device and then adds information to the device's screen to make whatever the person is viewing come alive with additional content.

The first time I saw it in action was when the folks at Verizon had partnered with a U.S. company working on AR. They showed me a magazine ad for a boot. When I activated the AR app on a smartphone and pointed it at the boot ad in the magazine, I could virtually lift the boot off the page and turn it 360 degrees or look at its bottom sole to get a sense of what that boot would look like in person.

But the folks from Zappar take this idea to new levels. One demo they showed me was of a Roald Dahl's children's book that was Zappar-enabled. When you point your iOS or Android smartphone or tablet at a page in the book when



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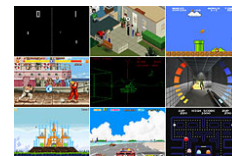
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using the Zappar viewing app, animated characters from the story pop onto the screen of the mobile device to “augment” the story line and experience. Or you can point it at a page that has black and white photos and the app colors them in. Or you can even have the app read the entire page aloud in a storyteller’s voice.

Zappar has been a big hit with Hollywood studios, too. The company recently AR’d movie posters and ad pages for Dreamwork’s dancing penguins feature *Happy Feet Two*. When the mobile app is pointed at the poster or ad in a magazine, the lead penguin dances a jig. What’s also cool is that you can keep the picture of the lead penguin on your screen and then point it at any kind of setting to virtually put the penguin in that setting. For example, Casper showed me the penguin in front of Big Ben as well as the Houses of Parliament.

The technology can even be used to put games on top of a picture. One example is putting the Zappar reader in the jewel case cover of a PlayStation, Xbox or Nintendo game and when you point your mobile device at the picture on the jewel case cover, a representation of the game pops up that can be played on your smartphone or tablet. The same can be done as an ad for a video game in any magazine — a game pops up related to the ad and can be played on the spot.

Zappar execs tell me that this could be used in museums and zoos as well. For example, if you are in a history museum, a stand in front of the exhibit explaining what you are looking at could be Zappar-enabled so that an animation of how a T-Rex moves, eats or fights could be seen, which would add a greater dimension to the museum experience. The same goes for a zoo. Most zoo animals are just sitting in their cages or exhibits. But if the plaque in front of the animals’ cages were AR enabled, you could get a video or animation of how they live in the wild.

However, I am most intrigued with the use of AR in advertising. I am a serious foodie and still get most of the major food magazines delivered to my home each month. But I am told that in the near future, I will be able to see a page with a recipe on it and, using AR, point my smartphone or tablet at it to get a video of the recipe being made. Or there might be an ad for a car in the magazine and if it’s Zappar-enabled, you could point your smartphone at it to view it from the top, bottom and all around it in 360 degrees.

One of the more interesting aspects of AR is that it could actually benefit the future print business. If readers of magazines and newspapers had Zappar-enabled content in the print editions, one could imagine a news story with an accompanying video that adds greater dimension to the print content at hand.

Once you see this AR app in action, it’s not hard to visualize how it could be used to really enhance a lot of static experiences to pretty much make them come alive.

Also, there are dozens of other AR-based companies working on leading edge technology like Zappar but Zappar is the only company that has shown me their AR apps in person so far. Also, of the AR apps I am aware of, Zappar seems the furthest along in getting big support from ad agencies, Hollywood, game makers and others.

Just writing about an AR app might be informative, but you have to see it to really get an idea of how it works and how AR could eventually bring new dimensions to existing content.

Below are multiple links that show off how Zappar works. I highly suggest you check out some of these examples shown here.

Happy Feet Poster: <https://vimeo.com/32517241>

Asics Magazine Ad: <https://vimeo.com/41366462>

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Skylanders T-shirt Promo: <https://vimeo.com/49254411>

In the interest of disclosure: I have no personal interest in this company other than the fact that I invited their Managing Director to be on my CES Supersession panel titled “Big Thinkers, Disruptive Technologies” that’s happening on the first day of the show.

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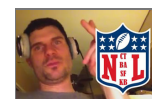
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