

Through the (3D) looking glass

Putting on a pair of plastic glasses to view a movie in 3D is so 2014. **Dion Chang** heads to Silicon Valley, USA and (literally) delves into the new realm of 3D and spatial technology



I've never really got the point of watching a movie in 3D. Sure, you might flinch every now and again as an object seemingly comes flying at you, but it always seems very orchestrated – intended to make you aware of the technology, rather than being part of the storyline.

However, on a recent trip to Silicon Valley, I literally saw the future in 3D, and with it, the commercial tipping point of augmented reality. Tech companies are working on a common

goal: to provide you with a new perspective on the world in which you become immersed in a "metaverse".

A "metaverse" blurs the boundaries between virtual and augmented reality. With virtual reality, you're placed in a completely imaginary world, whereas with augmented reality, an imaginary world is layered onto a physical space. A "metaverse" is a virtually enhanced physical reality in which you're able to interact. Google and Intel, in particular, are pushing these virtual boundaries.

Intel's RealSense™ technology, for example, allows you to scan yourself and place yourself in a computer game, instead of choosing an avatar, as well as physically see your hands inside the game. (Note to non-gamers: This is a big deal for gamers.)

Google's been working on something it calls Tango: technology that can sense, measure and map your surroundings in 3D.

So what's the big deal?

This month, a new Lenovo phablet called the PHAB2 Pro will

become available globally. It's the world's first Tango-enabled smartphone, which is essentially your entry ticket to the metaverse.

The PHAB2 Pro comes with not one, but four cameras, which might seem a tad excessive. Besides a front and back one, which most smartphones have, there are another two cameras for depth and motion tracking. What this camera combination enables is "area learning": the phone can "see and sense" its surroundings in 3D, which allows you to enter the metaverse, interact and unlock a whole new world of augmented-reality experiences. What's more, the business opportunities are enormous.

Sensing technology enables virtual object placement, which will change the way people think about mapping indoor spaces such as museum or art gallery tours.

For the architectural, real estate, interior design and home decor industries, this will be transformative. Home-owners will now be able to use this technology to re-imagine their homes by placing augmented-reality furnishings inside their physical living spaces. They'll also be able to measure spaces like window frames and countertops accurately with the phone, rather than with a measuring tape, due to this 3D "area learning" technology.

In 2013, Ikea launched an app that allowed customers to place items from its printed catalogue into an augmented-reality space, so the technology itself isn't really new. What is new is the seamless convergence of ecommerce and precise spatial mapping, which is now embedded in a smartphone.

The key to the metaverse is now literally in your hands. 📱

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