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Augmented Reality and You

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce

Virtual and augmented reality are hot topics right now, and for good reason. In the near future, they could dramatically impact us in both our personal lives and in our corporate law practices.

Virtual reality tools could soon be used to prepare for trial. You could not only “A/B test” arguments on virtual jury members, but also practice for trial in a virtual courtroom indistinguishable from the real thing. Trial lawyers could use virtual reality to show jurors how an accident appeared to the victim. Or you could use virtual reality in compliance training exercises to make scenarios more realistic and engaging. Virtual offices could even provide some of the benefits of physical offices or meeting rooms for those who work at home or in an open floor plan.

However, augmented reality (AR) applications are closer to fruition and possibly even more useful than virtual reality. The most familiar AR hardware example is Google Glass, which made headlines several years ago (often for being kind of creepy) but then seemed to fade away. The unease that many people felt about Glass mainly had to do with its camera, which potentially turned any Glass wearer into, at best, a stealth filmmaker or spy. And admittedly the original Glass had inadequate battery life and did not make a compelling fashion statement.

But think how useful something like Google Glass could be in other respects. Imagine walking into a meeting room and becoming instantly informed of the names, titles, and functions of everyone in the room without having to ask. Imagine a more intelligent Siri, Alexa, or Google interface that could provide contextually appropriate information about regulations while you were meeting with a regulator, or provide the bases for an objection while you were in court. Law professors are already using AR to supplement standard teaching methods.

All of the big tech firms are working on AR (e.g., Apple with its ARKit framework, Google with

ARCore, and Facebook with its Oculus Rift-inspired platform). Games like Pokémon Go will continue to drive broader — and hopefully more practical — applications.

Although people tend to think of AR as visual, it can be auditory too. In the movie *Her*, an AI named Samantha provided the protagonist, Theodore, with all kinds of contextually useful information. I get a taste of that already. I have Apple's AirPods, and I often double-tap them to ask Siri a question. Right now, Siri has some trouble answering law-related questions. If I ask, "What is the statute of limitations in Pennsylvania?" Siri can pull up the relevant statute on my iPhone, iPad, or Mac in Safari, but cannot yet parse the webpage to speak the answer. However, that day is coming, and sooner than most people think.

As I write this, Google just announced its Google Pixel Buds; these are Bluetooth-enabled ear pods that can perform nearly instantaneous translations. Think about that for a moment — a Rosetta Stone-like device that could someday allow you to converse with any person speaking any language. Or to our own personal assistants — we may be talking to *Her* very soon…

AR can also be tactile. I wear an Apple Watch that helps me navigate when I'm walking around in a new area. It's a fantastic thing to be able to know where and which way to make a turn by how the watch taps me on the wrist. And for someone like me who tends to get lost in my thoughts, the Apple Watch taptic engine's gentle reminders that I have a conference call coming up in the next 15 minutes has often saved me from gaffes and missed opportunities.

Of course, AR and VR present legal risks as well as opportunities. Pokémon Go players trespassed, risked personal injury, and even wandered into dangerous minefields just to capture one more Pokémon. At least one municipality felt the need to pass a law requiring game makers to obtain approval to use parklands in their games.

As time goes on, the line between reality and augmented reality will likely begin to blur. Elon Musk, who apparently has the creativity, time, and money to tackle nearly anything imaginable, has set up a company called Neuralink, whose goal is to create an implantable AI/brain interface. That goal is likely a long way off. But since companies are already offering NFC implants to employees in lieu of keycards, and cochlear implants are already being used for assistive hearing, the idea that we may soon have AR implants is not so farfetched.

Whether you view these kinds of developments with anticipation or trepidation or both, AR combined with AI is probably going to influence the way we live and practice law in the very near future.

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