
THE FUTURE OF AUGMENTED REALITY AND B2C COMMERCE

An Industry Expert's Predictions for 2022



Table of Content

Introduction 3



The beginnings of AR 6



The current state of AR 9



Reaching the future 12



How to start embracing AT
in B2C commerce 15

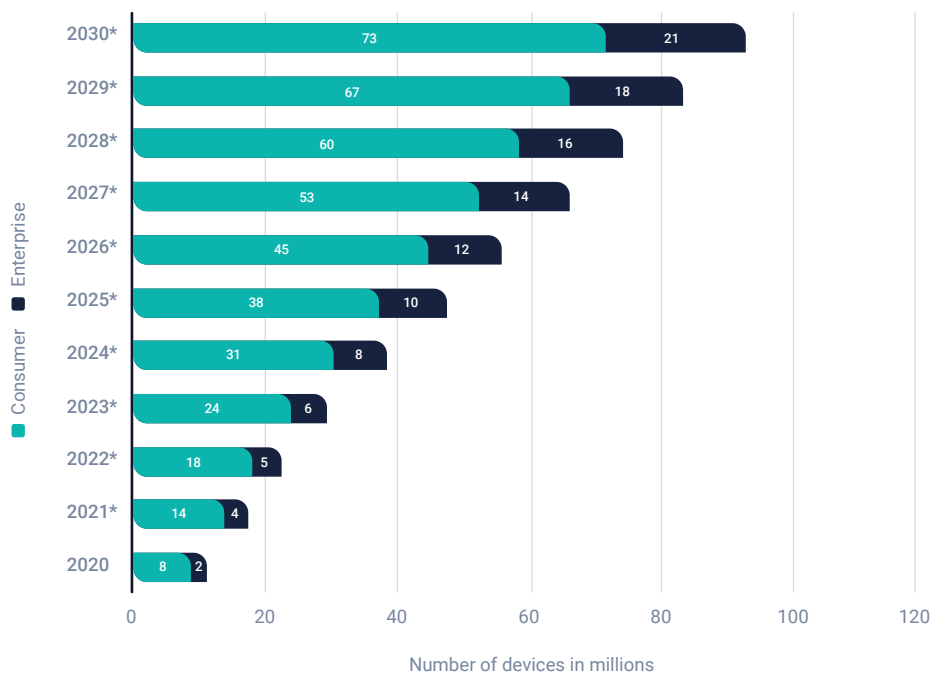


| Introduction

Introduction

Our society is on the brink of a digital renaissance. New technologies evolve every day, pushing us bit by bit towards a more internet-based world. However, that doesn't mean every idea is here to stay. Some may be trendy one moment and obsolete the next. It puts a lot of pressure on figuring out which technologies are worth your attention.

Augmented Reality (AR) is one of the newer technologies to grace the cyber stage. That's because it offers the unique experience of applying overlays of digital information to a physical space. It's not quite as immersive as the full digital overlay of Virtual Reality (VR), but that's also one of its strengths: it seamlessly blends next-level technology with the real world. Consumer interest in this area is evident in a recent study that predicts there will be [24 million dedicated AR/VR devices by 2023](#) and [73 million by 2030](#).



You might be familiar with AR thanks to its popularity in the gaming sphere. However, it also has business applications. For example, Ikea has an AR app that allows users to project furniture into their physical space. This allows them to better picture what it will look like and to understand how it will fit into their current environment. It also gives them a chance to rotate and examine it in a 3D space. Forrester cites digital experience technologies like this as [one of the most important aspects for the future of innovation](#).

But for all its potential, there's still a gnawing question:

Does AR technology have enough longevity and business applications to make it worth the investment?

Storyblok interviewed **Matt Key** to learn more about his view on the subject. Key is the owner and founder of Engine Creative, a digital creative services agency that's been in the marketing game for 25 years. Key is also responsible for the Reydar platform, a cutting-edge AR and Metaspace platform built around virtual product experience, which his company has developed to deliver AR and 3D experiences.



“We work with brands to deliver solutions across different channels, and as those channels develop in the technology and solution, AR is a key one for us.”

Key's experience and portfolio set him apart as a leading voice in the industry. Let's take a closer look at his predictions for the future of AR.

| **The beginnings of AR**

The beginning of AR

Believe it or not, AR and VR aren't new concepts. It's hard to pin down an exact date, but there have been [efforts for hundreds of years](#) to immerse folks in media! Some examples include:

- Panoramic paintings mean to take up your whole field of vision
- Stereoscopic viewers of the early 1800s
- Sensoramas in the 1950s

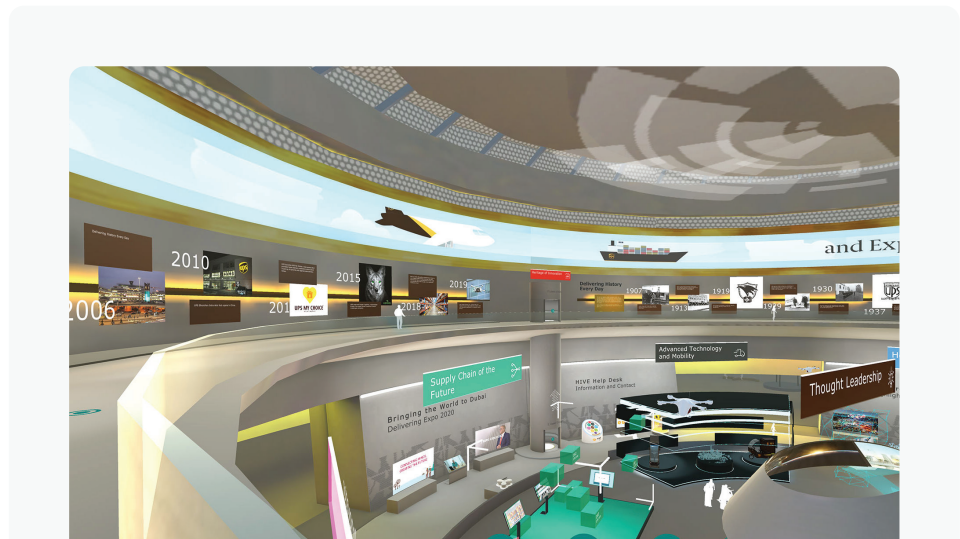
This tells us one thing for certain: **immersive experiences have always piqued our interest**. But let's jump into the modern age, with a specific focus on how B2C companies have been embracing the trend in the 21st century.

The first iPhone that could run AR was the iPhone 4, released in June of 2010. This is more or less the first time that AR became available to the general public. And as Key recalls, the marketing projects weren't far behind this technological breakthrough – in fact, he states that this progress was exactly what they were waiting on:



“The technology was the enabler there. We delivered new solutions when the technology was really kind of in the early stages and not very robust. Despite that, we developed the business model and worked with some big brands: Tesco, Bauer Publishing, lots of different magazines delivering these solutions.”

Key himself worked on a few projects in these early stages, including Top Gear magazine in 2011. Customers could use their phones to scan codes in a physical copy and receive a digital editorial experience, such as accessing exclusive videos or information about the latest releases. In 2012, he also undertook the task of creating a scannable album for the Ting Tings that would lead viewers to a music video.



An example of one of Key's more recent AR metaverse experience projects, HIVE by UPS.

These projects offered exactly what AR is designed to do: digitally augmenting a traditionally physical experience. And from here, similar projects continued to bloom. AR wasn't just a flashy new toy: **it was revolutionizing the longstanding B2C marketing goal of providing engaging content.**

However, this didn't necessarily mean it was a stable evolution. Key recalls that initial AR projects were sporadic and disconnected, meaning there was no cohesion between individual experiences. The early nature of the technology also reflected concerns that many business owners still have today: ideas and technology were rapidly evolving, shifting in priorities, becoming obsolete, and starting the cycle all over again. It had certainly grabbed the attention of marketers, but Key recalls that it wasn't until a few years ago that it really came into its own. That brings us to today.

| **The current state of AR**

The current state of AR

As people realize the value of AR and the technology progresses, its applications continue to grow. It's become an invaluable tool for bringing products to life when it comes to B2C commerce – [a trend that especially picked up when the pandemic hit](#) and demand for at-home experiences skyrocketed.

David's Bridal, for example, launched an AR arm of their omnichannel digital marketing experience in October 2020. It utilizes AR technology to give you a 3D understanding of dresses, allowing you to both see them in your space and get close to examine minute details. The app remains popular, with the number of available dresses steadily increasing. This implies that it's not just the pandemic that's driving demand for AR experiences.

The data doesn't lie, either: studies show that [83.7 million people in the US use AR at least](#) once per month. Nevertheless, Key warns, it's not nearly as simple as jumping on the trend. He cites the exciting, new, limitless opportunities of AR as reasons why getting involved is difficult in the first place. No boundaries mean no points of entry – so if you don't know exactly what you want your tech to do, getting started can be a huge challenge:



“Clients see something they want to do, but they’re not sure why they want to do it.”

No direction in AR is just as bad as no direction in other campaigns – potentially worse if you're making the technology investment without a clear goal. If you need a starting point, Key can pin down the most frequently requested item from his clients: Product Experiences.

It's not about the flash. Most of his clients are looking to provide product information in a tangible, relatable way. Rather than an end in and of itself, AR experience is more of a means to make these traditional marketing goals succeed.

It does this by providing more opportunities for engaging experiences. This encourages more brand interaction and deepens the impact: seeing and holding products in a real space brings them to life.

These engaging experiences were at the heart of the Top Gear magazine project that Key recounted earlier despite the decade that's passed. As he notes, this isn't a coincidence. Key believes that marketing goals for AR have largely remained the same – it's the technology that has changed.

But the journey isn't over yet. As a relatively young technology, AR still has considerable upgrades on the horizon, even if we don't know exactly what those will look like. That means as a B2C business, your goals may be clear, but the technology itself might not yet be able to support them.



“These things take time. And the ideas tend to be years ahead of the actual solution.”

This can make the investment seem risky. After all, what's the use in investing in technology that's still in flux with unknown changes around the corner? That's why it's important to look ahead.

Reaching the future

Reaching the future

Key considers big companies like Facebook entering the scene to be the most stabilizing influence yet. He believes that the recent soft launch of the metaverse is particularly significant for AR as it promises to bring all the disparate products and experiences under one umbrella.



“Instead of a grid of products on a flat 2D screen, the way we see the future of experiencing brands and products is in the next dimension, in three dimensions, and therefore you’ve got to create a space that makes sense for your brand to have those connections in there.”

It promises to replace the disjointed web of isolated projects with a holistic network similar to today’s internet. But like the ideas outpacing the technology, Key believes that there’s still a lot of ground that [the metaverse and its precursors](#) will need to cover before it truly revolutionizes B2C AR:

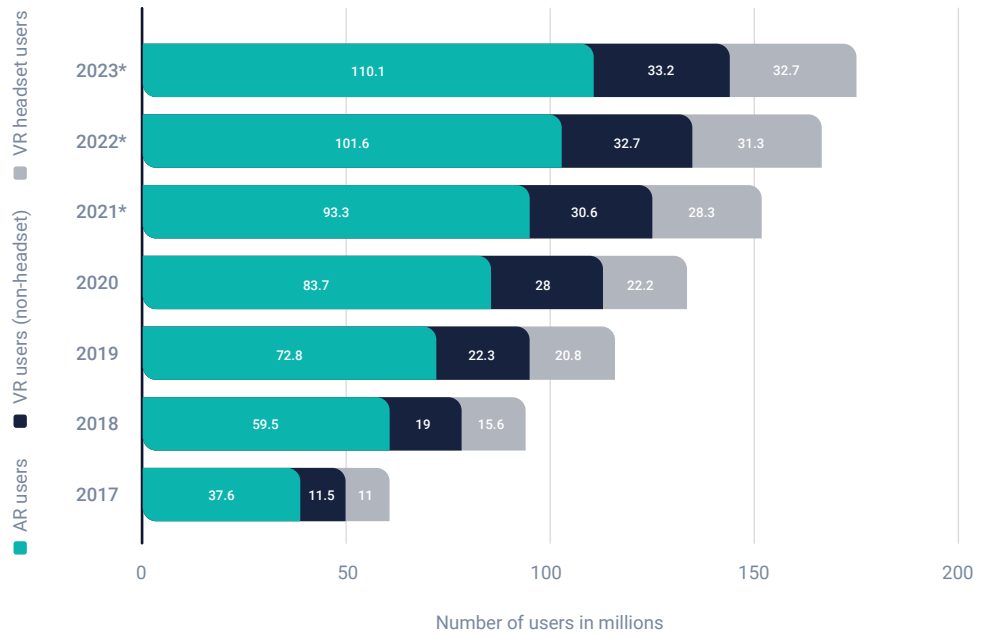


“When people say ‘metaverse’, they think of this one place where they can connect with people, you can buy things, everyone can join in this virtual world. That’s the end goal vision. But that’s probably 5 or 10 years away.”


5 to 10 years may sound like too far in the future to think about right now. But notably, enterprise-level organizations are already seriously considering the future of AR even in these early stages. [JP Morgan](#) recently conducted their own survey, reporting a few significant advances that technology will have to make before the metaverse can live up to its potential:

- More capacity to support more complexity
- Less local hardware requirements
- Better connection between platforms
- Ways to make digital assets transferable

So there's still a lot of work to be done. But the fact that companies are spending time and energy pinning down exactly what that work will be is promising for the field. These experiences won't be flashy extras for long. Its efficacy is likely to only increase as technological investments rise and acknowledgment of its potential grows.



With AR and VR users set to jump to [110 million users by 2023](#), it's clearly an industry on the rise. But it's also currently difficult to say exactly what form it will take in the next few years. Key predicts it'll be a best-of-both-worlds scenario – as long as you can serve those core marketing goals:



“There’s no point in doing it just because it’s new or it’s a gimmick. It has to have utility. It has to be useful. It has to solve a problem and provide an end benefit to the user.”



How to start embracing AR/VR in B2C commerce

How to start embracing AR/VR in B2C commerce

Prioritizing your marketing goals isn't all you'll need to do. Knowing how you'll apply it practically is also essential. New tech comes and goes, so start with a future-proof system that can help you accomplish whatever the future brings. That's where Storyblok comes in.

Storyblok is a headless CMS. That means it's separated the backend from the frontend, giving you more flexibility and power than a traditional CMS. Instead of a single monolithic structure, you'll work with a central content hub. That way, you can streamline consistent content for your AR projects and connect to any channel you want it to through the use of APIs. This also means you can incorporate AR into your current plans without worrying about how it'll affect the existing tech – they'll all be connected by that central hub, but remain segmented enough to run independently.

Moreover, this also powers a best-of-breed approach that lets you choose the ideal technology for each of your purposes. Do you want to use one engine for your AR experience, a different one for VR, and a third one for your online store? It's up to you! You'll never have to settle for ill-fitting programs, meaning each of your projects will be able to live up to its full potential.

Ready to learn more about how Storyblok can help your organization embrace the future of AR and VR? Contact one of our experts today to start your journey!



ABOUT MATT KEY

Matt Key is the advertising and branding expert behind Engine Creative. He's also the innovator behind Reydar, the revolutionary AR/VR virtual products platform working to engage customers like never before. Key has worked with international brands including Facebook, Disney, and Tesco to craft bespoke digital experiences for a variety of audiences.

Your Headless CMS

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