Meta 2: Hands-On With The AR Startup's Latest Kit

(https://cdn.uploadvr.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/IMG_0044.jpg)

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The last time I was allowed to try out Meta's AR headset was by invitation in a closed room. I was not allowed to take photos. At SVVR, though, when I entered the room I was told I could take as many photos or videos as I pleased. This was a different Meta than I had ever encountered before, and the technology placed upon my head had progressed too.

(https://cdn.uploadvr.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/IMG_0050.jpg)

What I was trying, according to the company representative with me in the booth, was the finalized version of the Meta 2 that will soon be shipping to anyone with $945 to spare.

The biggest difference between the shipping Meta 2 and the prototype (https://uploadvr.com/meta-2-ar-hands-on/) is its tracking method. This headset was outfitted with inside-out positional tracking instead of relying on external, third party cameras. Tracking was the Meta 2's biggest weakness and so the biggest question for me going into this demo was whether or not that had been improved. In short: it has.

In long: the Meta 2 does not track perfectly. There is the occasional hiccup, jutter or glitch as you move around the digital objects being rendered before you. These issues are more pronounced when you include hand interactions. During my demo I had the chance to use my hands to interact with an array of assets including a malleable cube, a car model, planet Earth and a brain. These were all similar to the assets I was given access to during my previous demo, and I noticed improved, but not perfect, positional tracking and proximity detection in the upgraded hardware.

The AR scene is young but it already has already found its leader in Microsoft's HoloLens (https://uploadvr.com/microsoft-missed-mobiles-wants-make-hololens/). Any headset that wants to break into the industry will invariably have to go through a gauntlet of "how is this different/better/worse/ than the HoloLens" questions. Meta 2 is no exception so let's get that out of the way.

Meta 2 has a much larger field of view than HoloLens. This is primarily due to a difference in display methods. The exchange for more field of view for Meta 2 appears to be a dip in image resolution compared to HoloLens. The resolution

difference was noticeable but, personally, I prefer a wider FOV over pumped up resolution when it comes to this generation of AR.

The HoloLens inside-out tracking, however, remains the industry standard. The Meta 2's is serviceable but lacks that rock solid reliability people have come to expect from Microsoft's system.

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Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Meta 2 will still be a wired headset when these devices finally begin shipping. HoloLens is completely wireless but you will still need to wire your Meta 2 into a sufficiently beefy PC in order for it to run. This tether may help Meta 2 fill out that big FOV, but it's also keeping it from hitting the usability standards that the AR world is demanding right now.

Despite the pre-order being open to all, Meta is describing this hardware as being "primarily for developers," with the representative in my booth likened it to the Oculus DK1 (https://xinreality.com/wiki/Oculus_Rift_DK1). Select shipments have already begun and the company hopes to have all existing orders fulfilled by the end of calendar 2017.

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