

The killer app for virtual reality: Shopping!

By: [Michael Björn](#) 20 January, 2016 [Business](#) , [People](#) , [Technology](#) [10 Hot Consumer Trends](#), [consumer trends](#), [ConsumerLab](#), [shopping](#), [virtual reality](#), [VR](#)

Virtual reality (VR) headsets seem to be all the rage right now. There are dozens of very cheap models that you can slip your smartphone into – and a number of companies are this year releasing high quality VR headsets that do not rely on your smartphone.

But this is not the first time such headsets have been on the market: Nintendo released their [Virtual Boy](#) system already in 1995 – and withdrew it less than a year later. Will VR flop as badly this time round too?

Actually, our research at [Ericsson ConsumerLab](#) indicates that VR now stands a good chance of becoming widely accepted – if it goes beyond gaming applications quickly enough.

Respondents in our surveys are interested in VR games, but the most striking result is the range of VR services people show interest in: everything from VR dating and virtual home offices to immersive video experiences of different kinds.

And, most of all, people are interested in shopping.

People usually laugh at this. Shopping seems so trivial, and so far removed from high tech. But given that advertising is one of the most pervasive applications of the internet, shopping can be high tech too.

We published a report in 2012 showing that as many as 73% of consumers really disliked the fact that they can't see, touch, or try things when shopping online. Using some high tech to solve that issue makes sense. And in fact, 64% were interested in using VR to see items in real size and form when shopping online in our 2015 survey. That was the most popular service of all we tested!

The majority of consumers think virtual reality would be good for online shopping.

But our research also shows that in-store and online shopping are not separate activities – they are intertwined. As a consequence, devices will have to be mobile, unobtrusive and not geeky, in the sense that use should conform reasonably well to current social norms. Whereas walking down the corridors of the local grocery store with your nose so deep into your mobile screen that you constantly bump into other shoppers is socially accepted behavior, walking around with your face covered in black VR headgear with arms stretched out in front like a zombie is not.

Luckily, some manufacturers understand the importance of building on current behaviors; the [Glyph](#) is for example essentially a headphone set. But the headband hides a pair of eyepieces and you can literally slide the headband in front of your eyes and see video in 2D or 3D. It could potentially be used to see the actual size and shape of products online. Using a smartphone. In a store.

As shopping is about to go virtual, we at Ericsson ConsumerLab believe that one of the most important trends to watch is how virtual gets real. For example, half of the smartphone users we surveyed also want a 3D selfie that can be used as an avatar to try on clothes online.

But when [virtual gets real](#), we may not even need to shop for some things. We can instead print them in 3D – such as spoons, toys, and spare parts for appliances. In fact, 44% said they even want to print their own food!

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