The IKEA Personal Assistant

Introduction

In this document I expand on the initial idea that came in the ideation phase, where I used a morphological chart and the COCD-box to ideate and filter out ideas for using volumetric capture in media campaigns. This concept provides a potential application to use volumetric capture in media campaigns, delivering a competitive edge for GroupM. The following is an extended briefing of the concept for the brand IKEA.

Description

Virtual AR Assistant for smartphones, designed to offer user specific answers about products and services such as product alternatives or opening hours and delivery options based on the user's location. It also provides a personalised catalogue based on the requirements given by the user. This assistant can be controlled by voice and allows users to visualise furniture in their space, demonstrating products in real life scenarios with people using the furniture, as well as displaying the mounting of the items, aiding an elevated informed decision-making for customers from the comfort of their home.

The Challenge

How Can We Encourage Customers to Make Purchases Online?

The IKEA personal assistant aims to address the problem of customer uncertainty when shopping online for furniture.

According to IKEA's latest year review, 75% of the sales were made in stores, and only 22% were made online. This is in contrast with the ongoing digitalisation of modern industries and the tendency of customers to make purchases online. IKEA could bridge this gap by providing customers with better demonstrations of their products by using virtual assistants, showcasing real life scenarios and giving that look and feel customers are looking for in the stores, right from their home. These customers would also benefit from personalised recommendations based on their specific wants and needs on the spot like in the store with any sales assistant. At the same time, this could potentially reduce costs of maintenance in store and help create a more sustainable world by reducing its carbon footprint. IKEA stores are not always near every customer, meaning they need to travel long distances. In addition, IKEA is looking to expand its horizons, recently opening its first stores in emerging countries such as Chile and The Philippines. These emerging countries have seen an accelerated digital growth over the years which poses an attractive market for e-commerce.

This concept aligns perfectly with IKEA's vision, which is to provide a diverse selection of home furnishing products to a wide audience. By offering a Virtual AR Assistant that allows customers to visualise and assess furniture from the comfort of their homes, IKEA stays true to its goal of reaching as many people as possible with a convenient and inclusive shopping experience.

The Benefits of Volumetric Capture

Volumetric capture adds immense value to the user experience, taking it to a whole new level of interactivity and immersion. Volumetric capture is a cutting-edge technology that enables the creation of 3D representations of people and real-world objects, such as sales assistants and real life scenarios for furniture.

Realistic and Immersive Experience

Volumetric capture creates a lifelike representation of the assistant, making the interaction with the virtual assistant feel more natural and engaging. Users can see the assistant as if they were present in the same physical space.

Enhanced Product Explanation

With volumetric capture, the sales assistant can demonstrate product features in a more dynamic and interactive way. This allows users to better understand the products, their functionalities, and how they can be used in real-life scenarios.

Ease of Technical Assistance

In scenarios like guided mounting and assembling furniture, volumetric capture of the technical assistant can provide step-by-step instructions with visual cues, making the process easier to follow and reducing the chances of errors during assembly.

Improved Customer Engagement

The use of volumetric capture and AR technology can significantly increase customer engagement with the product and the application. It makes the shopping experience more interactive and enjoyable, which may lead to increased sales and customer satisfaction.

Scalability

Volumetric capture allows for easy scaling of the virtual assistant to reach a wider audience. It can be deployed on multiple AR smartphone applications, making it accessible to a larger customer base.

Flexibility & Versatility

Once a real life scenario is captured, it can be used in a wide range of other applications such as magazines, video ads and campaigns.

Key Features

Virtual Personal Assistant

A Sales Assistant displayed through an AR smartphone application explaining the product, asking for user preferences and giving recommendations. The assistant could also ask questions related to the customer's home in order to provide better advice on furniture and the arrangement around the house. For instance, questions related to the activities that the user might want to do at home, and how much space there is available. This assistant would display the furniture in the user's home first to see how it fits, and provide immersive visualisations of different scenarios for a good representation from which the user can place itself.

Volumetric capture would be used to record this assistant providing product explanations with animated visualisations regarding product features, such as adjustable standing desks. This assistant would also be captured for predetermined questions in order to provide available options.

Real Life Scenarios

Day-to-day scenarios showing how the furniture would be used through the AR application. This could primarily be social activities such as:

Friends coming over

To display a new sofa, this scenario could display a group of friends coming over to pop open a couple of beers and sit to watch a football match.

Family dinner

To display an extendable table, this scenario could display a family putting together the table and sitting together.

Work From Home

To display an adjustable standing desk, this scenario could display a person getting coffee and adjusting the table to the right height.

Volumetric capture would be used to record these real life scenarios demonstrating and visualising the use of the furniture and how they would fit, bringing a better overall picture to the customer.

Guided Mounting

A technical assistant unboxing the packages for the furniture and assembling it together, displaying the space required, the steps the user needs to follow and the amount of time.

Volumetric capture would be needed to capture the technical assistant doing the assembling.

Shopping Experience

To use the AR assistant, the user can click on the screen or use voice commands to make the experience more realistic and smooth. The user can save in a wishlist and compare different furniture items, add items to a shopping cart, and ultimately make a purchase right inside of this app.

Target Audience

Young Families & Students

Younger generations, such as millennials and Generation Z, are known to be more accustomed to online shopping and digital experiences. This concept may appeal to these demographics, who often seek convenience and personalization in their shopping interactions. Also, young people often don’t want to spend too much time travelling or walking around the store.

Customers in Remote Areas

Customers who do not have easy access to physical IKEA stores, especially those living in remote areas or regions without IKEA store locations nearby. For these customers, the online shopping experience with Volumetric Capture can provide a viable alternative to in-store visits.

Environmentally Conscious Customers

Environmentally conscious customers who appreciate IKEA's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint by encouraging online shopping and reducing the need for physical store visits.

Potential Expansions

Home Scan

The app could potentially scan the area of the house through computer vision and determine what are the most efficient ways to arrange the house, taking into consideration the wants and needs of the user.

Hologram Real Time Sales Assistants

In a not so distant future, where volumetric capture studios are more affordable, real sales assistants could be used for real time hologram calls, making the experience even more personal and engaging.

Artificial Intelligence Sales Assistants

With the current acceleration in the development of Artificial Intelligence, this technology and Volumetric Capture could be used in combination to bring virtual assistants that are undifferentiable of real sales assistants, including all the advantages this concept already provides and reducing personnel costs.

Alignment with Trends

Digitalization

Digitalization has transformed how businesses operate, interact with customers, and offer products and services. The concept fully embraces digitalization by utilising AR smartphone applications and volumetric capture technology. The entire sales process, from product explanations to personalised recommendations and virtual try-ons, is delivered through digital means. This aligns well with the trend, providing a modern and technologically advanced shopping experience.

Personalization

Personalization has become a significant trend as customers increasingly seek tailored experiences that resonate with their individual preferences and needsThe virtual personal assistant collects user preferences, asks questions related to the customer's home, and tailors furniture recommendations accordingly. By offering immersive visualisations of different scenarios and showing how the furniture fits into the user's home, the concept aims to create a personalised shopping experience for each user.

Virtual Try-On Technology

Virtual try-on technology is on the rise and it promises to revolutionise the way customers shop for clothing online. The virtual assistant aligns well with virtual try-on technology as it enables users to see how furniture looks and fits in their actual living space. By using AR and volumetric capture, customers can virtually try out different furniture pieces, understand their dimensions, and see how they complement their home decor. This enhances the overall shopping experience and reduces the need for physical showrooms.

Sustainability

Sustainability is the growing focus on environmentally friendly practices to reduce the impact on the planet. Consumers are increasingly seeking sustainable products and supporting eco-conscious businesses. By offering a virtual shopping experience through AR smartphone applications, customers can explore furniture options and make purchase decisions from the comfort of their own homes. This eliminates the need for individuals to drive to physical stores, which in turn reduces the carbon emissions associated with transportation.

Conclusion

The “IKEA personal assistant” concept takes advantage of new and exciting emerging technologies, using volumetric capture to bring an unprecedented level of realism. IKEA customers are provided with a highly engaging experience that provides an unparalleled level of immersiveness and helps customers trigger their creativity and imagination to make their home a happy place.

The assistant also lets customers feel listened to and taken care of by providing a personal and human touch, reducing time lost in travel and in the store, ultimately increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty, while at the same time it helps reduce the carbon footprint.

Displaying real life scenarios of the furniture helps customers build an emotional connection with the furniture and clear any uncertainty while shopping, solving the main challenge of having to go to the store instead of making purchases online.

In short, “IKEA personal assistant” has the potential to change how customers buy their furniture and increase IKEA’s reach globally.

In short, “IKEA personal assistant” has the potential to completely turn around how customers buy their furniture items, while making it easier for IKEA to expand its horizons into emerging markets, making everyone feel at home.