

Evan Spiegel Is Willy Wonka

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6-7 minutes

or, The Exquisite Rollout of Spectacles



Snap Inc. — the parent company of Snapchat — started a rollout of a product yesterday that made the marketer and product designer in me literally shake my head it was so well done. Spectacles, glasses with a camera attached (or a camera with glasses attached?) were finally introduced to the world.

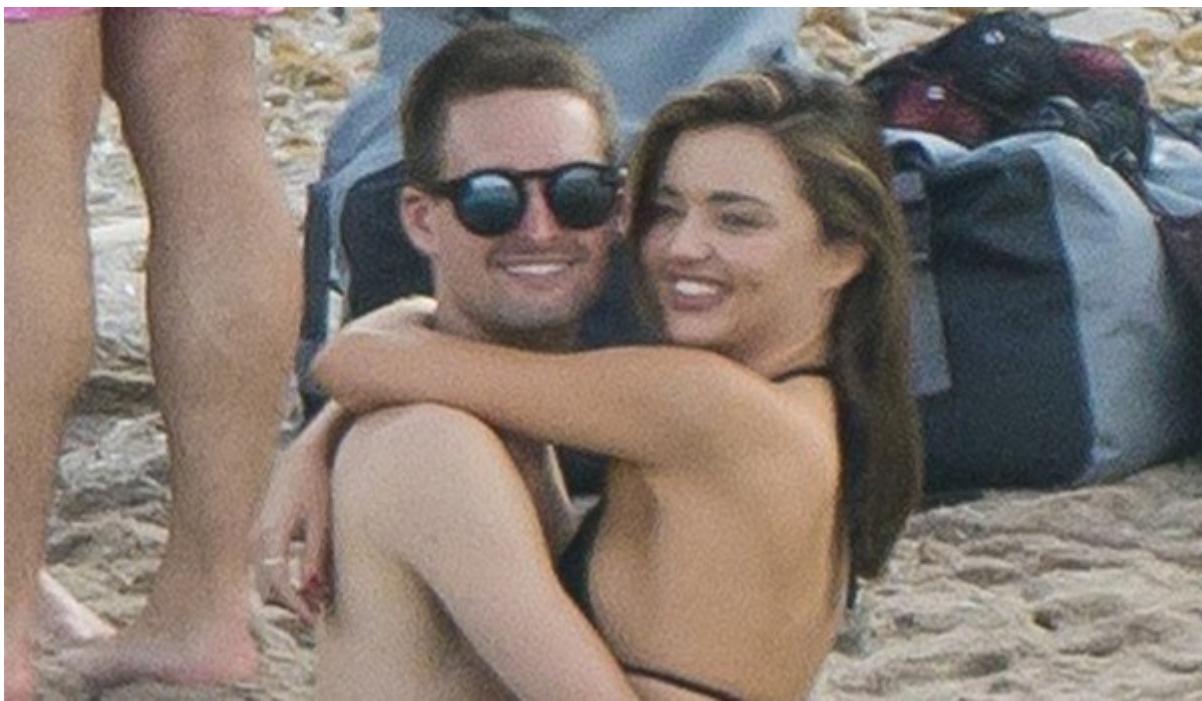
And as I caught some of *Willy Wonka And The Chocolate Factory* (the good one) on TV last night, it hit me: Snap CEO Evan Spiegel is tech's Willy Wonka.

Spiegel, who studied product design at Stanford, may not have the same mystique among the public (Steve Jobs was closer in that way...and by the way, Spiegel has a portrait of him in his office) as Wonka — but the way he carefully crafts, rolls out, and markets his company's products (and it's not just Spectacles — it's Stories, Lenses, Memories, etc.) is unparalleled in the world today...so I had to dip into a fictional universe to make a worthy comparison.

Wonka was a brand associated with delight, fun, and mystery, and I'd argue that those adjectives describe Snap perfectly, too.

Snap's stunning execution developing and marketing Spectacles deserves a timeline:

In December 2014, [Snapchat bought Vergence Labs](#), a company building a Google Glass-type product, for \$15 million. This raised some eyebrows, as social apps don't traditionally do hardware.



via Fortune

The tech industry speculated about Snapchat's plans for Vergence through 2015 and the first half of 2016. In June, Spiegel was spotted wearing a prototype version of the glasses, and it was clear that something was brewing.

Finally, in September (and I say “finally”, but that’s actually a pretty quick turnaround from acquiring Vergence in December 2014 — I wonder if they were already working on them...) Snapchat drops a bombshell: The glasses are coming, and they’re called [Spectacles](#). They, like Snapchat, are now a product under the newly-named parent company [Snap Inc](#). And finally, they wanted us to know that Snap is “a camera company.”



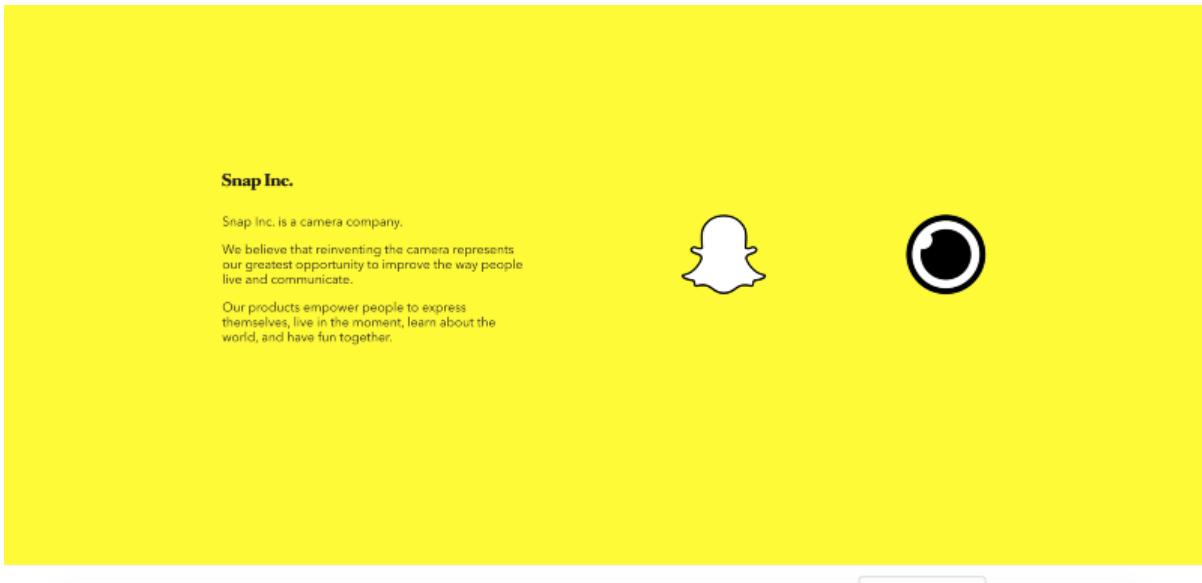
Spectacles come in three colors.

It may be obvious, but there's brilliance in the simplicity of these decisions:

Snap = to take a photo. Snap is a camera company.

Snapchat = take a photo + message it. The app.

Spectacles = eyeglasses, or “something that attracts attention because it is very unusual or very shocking.”



[Snap's website](#)

Anyway, Spectacles looked stylish enough, but kind of funky in a way that should shield the design from criticism, as they're not pretending to be super sleek. They are, as Spiegel sneakily positioned them, a "toy."

Over the past couple months, there have been questions about how Snap will distribute Spectacles. Do they give them to influencers or celebrities? Do they sell them from their website? Do they do Kanye West-style popup stores all over the country?

In Snap fashion, they did something entirely their own.





They decided to sell them in vending machines. Or, more accurately, one vending machine — in Venice, CA, the town where their headquarters are located. Spectacles' vending machines are a product in themselves. They're called Snapbots. Snapbots have personality and make for a delightful purchasing

experience. [@spectacles](#) was retweeting customers who were having fun buying them yesterday, probably in an effort to make me feel extremely jealous.

Even finding the Snapshot is an adventure. There's a [map](#) on Spectacles' website— otherwise, there's no way to know where they'll be. It's so radically different from going to a Best Buy you've been to dozens of times, or getting a brown box on your doorstep. It's designed to be an experience that gets you talking — and snapping.

Oh, and maybe my favorite part: just like snaps themselves, Snapbots only last for 24 hours. Then they're gone.

(Note: they cost \$129, but are fetching \$1,000+ on [eBay](#).)

Snap has considered those of us not able to reach a Snapshot, too. And by the way — the person or team who designed this little mechanism deserves a raise or something:





Me with the Spectacles lens. Wish this photo was smaller.

Snap built a lens that lets you try Spectacles on before you buy. But the lens isn't included in Snapchat. You have to go to their website (and presumably read a bit about Spectacles) to unlock it.

Then, you happily use one of their products (Snapchat) to "try on" the glasses and promote another one of their products (Spectacles) to friends who see your snap. It's one of the tightest product marketing integrations I've ever seen.

I'm not sure where they'll go from here. How long will Spectacles be sold exclusively through Snapbots? Will the Snapbots ever become stationary? What will V2 look like?

I don't know. The timing is interesting, though, as there's no doubt in my mind that it was done with purpose. Do they have the production capacity to make Spectacles The Christmas Toy of 2016? Maybe, maybe not. But the customer desire is definitely there. Just check Twitter.

Update, 11.12.16 at 10:52 AM: There's now a countdown on Spectacle's "[find a bot](#)" page, and when time is up, the page will presumably reveal the location of the next Snapshot(s).

In classic Snap fashion, they're not trying to market Spectacles too obviously. A product as foreign as glasses with a camera attached requires a measured approach. There was no global message to Snapchat users yesterday, as there often is when they drop a new product. We've seen them do the splashy launches, but they also understand the benefits of a slow buildup, and the satisfaction users get from discovering things on their own. Plus, nothing is as uncool as a product that's being blatantly pushed by its creator, and Snap will avoid that vibe like the plague.

It's still so early in this product's lifecycle. There are only a couple thousand people who own Spectacles right now. They could absolutely flame out. But the business side of me couldn't help it: the Snap marketing team has handled this rollout so elegantly, they deserve a spotlight — even if they don't want one.

Thanks for reading! Find me on Twitter (and [Snapchat](#)) [@adamokane](#).