

Augmented Reality: A New Customer Experience

Size doesn't have to be a limiting factor anymore to convey customer information through pots, tags, and labels.

By Maria Zampini

What if there was a way for growers and retailers to engage consumers for longer periods of time and increase the chance of a sale, or generate multiple sales? What if this connection was entertaining, educational, and interactive? The technology to fulfill these questions is not in a galaxy far, far away; it is already here. It is augmented reality, and it's ready to take us to the next dimension.

Consumers Can Visualize Products in Real-Time Environments

Augmented reality, or AR, is the integration of digital information with the user's environment in real time. It superimposes digital scenarios on the physical world through mobile devices. This differs from virtual reality where the user is solely in an artificial environment.

Unlike quick response or QR codes that are two-dimensional (2-D), taking you to a web page for example, AR is a 3-D experience.

AR can add digital content into what consumers see with their phones and immerse them in a new, real-time reality. The digital content can be in the form of videos, sounds, games, and more, adding other layers of interaction for an all-encompassing experience. But AR isn't limited to just games like Pokémon Go. It is big business

being used by multiple industries. Business Wire states AR is predicted to be worth more than \$60 billion by 2023.

For better or worse, most people's lives revolve around their smartphones, which are the go-to tools for instant information. Eighty percent of Generation Z (people born from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s) use a mobile device when shopping. As AR currently exists, you download an app reader to scan and open up the AR experience. Downloading apps is common. A Synchrony Study, for instance, notes that 67% of shoppers download and use retail apps.

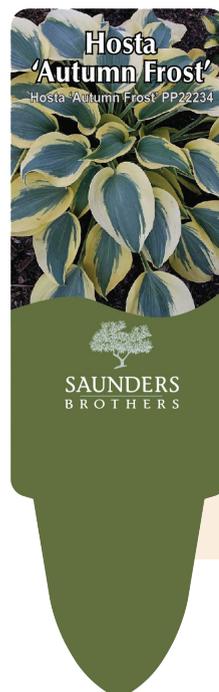
Targeted and Seasonal Messaging Possible With AR

Our industry has the perfect conduit to link brands and their messages to shoppers. The plant tag, pot, and/or signage are logical targets for introducing AR and provide an innovative and effective, one-of-a-kind experience at point of sale that engages gardeners in ways that influence purchase decisions and reinforce brand awareness.

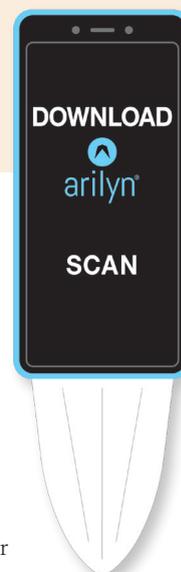
In a nutshell, AR is as easy as 1, 2, 3:

1. Download AR app.
2. Scan a target product with a smart device camera.
3. Engage with relevant, digital content that is entertaining or educational and tailors an in-store message encouraging consumers to buy your product.

AR content can change seasonally and automatically on a given target to continually refresh the experience. In spring, a hydrangea tag might show how to plant it, and then in the summer it changes to cutting and drying hydrangea blossoms.



When a user scans the Saunders Brothers' stake tag, after downloading the Arilyn app, they get two augmented reality experiences. They can scan the hosta image full-frame for a 360° view, or they can scan the Saunders Logo full-frame for a different experience. Photos: HIP Labels



You can also provide specific growing assistance by geographic location. For example, the cultural advice for a plant sold in Northern states might be different than what a person receives who purchases the same plant in the South.

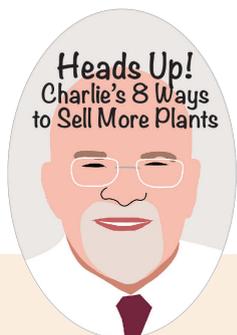
Independent garden centers and staff have numerous ways to inform and persuade consumers to participate in AR such as signage, social media exposure, enews, coupons, discounts, rewards, etc.

According to Gartner Inc., a leading research and advisory company, more than 100 million consumers will use AR to shop in the future. It appears developers' promise that augmented reality will change the way we live is becoming real. Will you jump on board the AR starship or remain earthbound? **GG**

To try augmented reality for yourself, download the Arilyn app from the Google Play Store or the Apple App Store, then scan the images included with this article.



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This HIP supplemental insert tag features Dr. Charlie Hall's retail prescription for selling more plants and includes a link to the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture website.