

Background

Google has released a faster and smarter version of their Goggles application this week. Goggles version 1.3 is now available for download on Android as well as iPhones. As documented in our recent Augmented Reality and [Third Life](#) white papers, Goggles blurs the lines between the online and offline worlds by enabling consumers to use their phone to photograph objects and via identity recognition get information on the scanned image. In short, with a simple photograph and no text entry you get instant data on everything from products to landmarks. Results can include advertisements, user reviews, places nearby to buy, and promotions.

Details

The latest version of Google Goggles includes multiple tools and functions, including:

- Maps and location information
- Barcode recognition (both product and offer based)
- Translation of text
- Logo recognition
- Sudoku Solver!

The latest Goggle's version is another leap forward in visual search. However, Goggles is arguably more of a harbinger of things to come as the technology is not perfected yet. For example, the app is largely dependent on your phone's camera quality, which even determines whether the device can download the app. Consequently, iPhone 3G and the iPhone Touch 4G are not compatible with Goggles. In addition, while Goggles is great at scanning barcodes, the app is much poorer at recognizing everyday objects such as animals, plants, cars, furniture and apparel.

Implications

While still nascent, Google Goggles and visual search are gaining momentum as the technology improves and users begin to appreciate the benefits. Brands need to weigh the cost and effort to invest in this new space with the reach and usage that Goggles and other technologies have amongst different target audiences and markets. However, marketers should keep in mind that usage data is changing rapidly with the growth in smart phones, application downloads, and greater awareness and promotion of identity recognition benefits. For example, Tesco are now heavily promoting their new barcode scanning application in the UK; with one simple mobile photo you can add any product to your shopping basket and grocery delivery as well as doubling your Tesco club card points.

Summary

The new version of Goggles has resolved many of the previous version's issues and added some great new features, most notably faster and more relevant results. Similar to PC search engine marketing, brands should determine what strategy they wish to pursue when someone takes a photo of their brand, print ad, logo, and/or product. Opportunities include product information, promotions, advertisements (including video), local store locations, and reward schemes. Goggle's relevance to marketers will be dependent on target audience, markets, and ambitions. However, improvements in and promotion of visual recognition technology will increase usage in the coming years. At a minimum Goggles can be used an integration device between offline and online marketing, similar to QR codes, with the potential added benefit of building brand kudos.