Is Google Glass Too Ambitious?

By Kasey Panetta, Associate Editor ECN Magazine

Welcome to the future.

Google recently announced a new product called "Project Glass" [1] out of super-secret Google[x] Lab. The idea behind the project is creating light-weight augmented-reality glasses that allow the user to access apps, information, messages, texts, and basically anything else available on a smart phone without the bulky interface.

Designers released a video depicting a day in the life of a “Project Glass” user—at least the version of Google Glass the research and development team dreams about—and asked for feedback from consumers.

The video showcases an advanced speech-recognition application, video chat program, navigation system for walking, camera, and a myriad of other gadgets and treats for the user. The technological implications of designing such a light-weight device are daunting and definitely ambitious, but that's part of it's charm.

Is it just a dream?
Granted, even Google admitted they may have been a *little* overzealous with the project shown in the video, but that’s the whole point behind the Google[x] Lab. It’s a place to create and design the challenging technology of the future (i.e. an automated Google car.)

Google has been testing the prototype in-house—they’re hoping to go public by the end of next year—but has kept a tight lid on the details. Essentially, they’ve dreamed up what seems to be an impossibly futuristic device and shrouded it in mystery and secrecy.

It’s genius.

The designers are experts at offering tantalizing glimpses of the potential of the product without divulging any secrets or plans. Most recently, a video of a back-flipping employee wearing the glasses hit the internet.

Obviously, the prototype works on a limited capacity—focusing on mostly photos and video. But, the R & D team is definitely on their way to a solid product.

Though Google has been very secretive on the details of the technology behind the Google Glass, what has been revealed shows great promise. Plus, Sergey Brin, Google's co-founder, keeps showing up at events wearing the specs.

Cue intrigue.

When Brin wore the glasses on an interview for The Gavin Newsom show [2], he revealed the prototype has a swipe pad on the right side, allowing the user to scroll through the interface. Unlike the Google Glass in the initial video, the screen is only on the right side of the prototype. So the visuals don't appear directly in front of the user but rather in the peripheral of the right eye. The prototype makes more sense than the video, since centering the images would make it difficult to use the glasses while walking or moving, as internet fans have been quick to point out.

Google Glass of the future

The most exciting part of the prototype—besides the futuristic design—is the potential for the product to change the way people interact and do business.

The real-life applications could be endless, and by keeping fairly silent on their plans for applications, Google is fueling the creative fires.

Paramedics could send information and photos back to waiting doctors at the hospital without fumbling for a phone or other technology. Builders on the job-site could show clients living in another country the framework of their house with their hands free to point out specific problems. Journalists could take pictures and notes at the same time. Mechanics could view complicated electronics systems while actively working on vehicles. Apps that already exist, like GoogleEarth and Google Maps, would become infinitely more interactive.

In theory, it eliminates much of the physical barriers that limit smartphones or computers without sacrificing the software advancements of the past few years.

The Google Glass dilemmas

Of course, problems are inevitable.

One immediate concern is driving with a screen in your peripheral vision. Would there be an app that shuts down the glasses if they're moving over a certain speed? What sort of legal repercussions would there be?

Plus, looking at a screen so close to your eye for long periods of time could affect you physically. Computer screens are tough on your eyes; this could be worse.

What happens when advertisers want to show you ads 24/7? Because of the interactive nature of the glasses, the ads could become overwhelming.

None of these are earth-shattering problems, but they need careful consideration as the project moves forward.

The technology isn't quite up to par just yet, but with the creative and design teams behind the project, it won't be too long before everyone's sporting a pair. We hope.

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