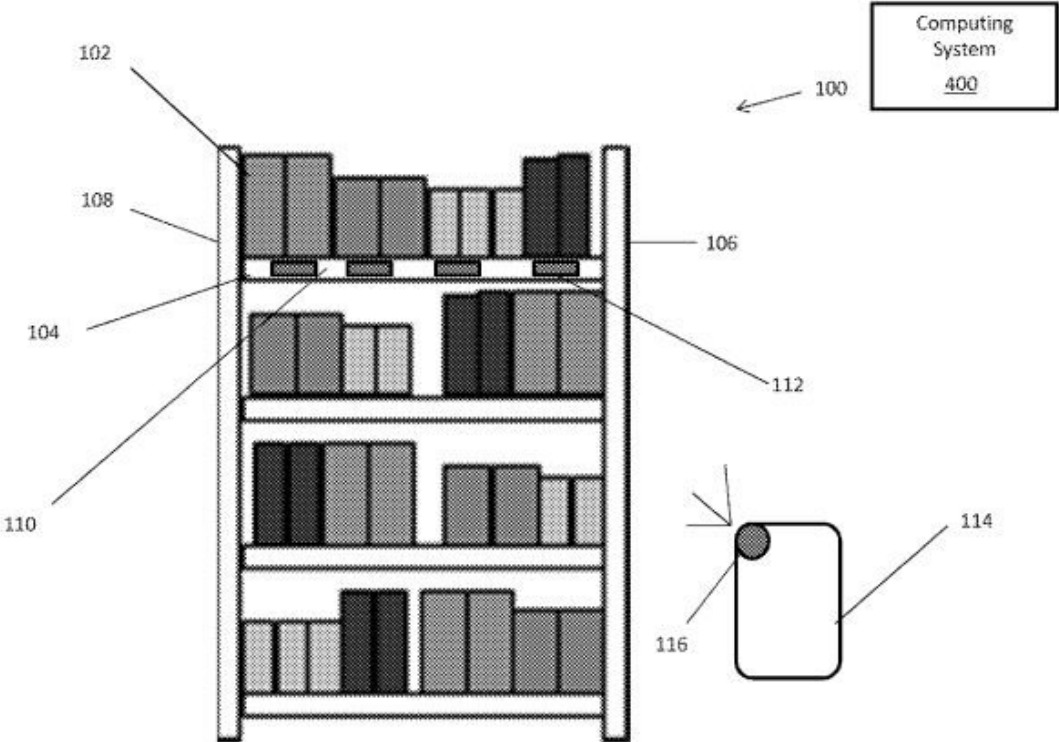


Patent talk reveals Walmart's look at virtual reality system for shoppers

August 22 2018, by Nancy Owano



If patent applications are anything to go by, then Walmart's wish list apparently includes a virtual reality shopping system—complete with fulfillment center technology.

The giant retailer has two filings with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office applications that flesh out their concepts for a virtual show room and fulfillment system. The patents have retail watchers busy pondering the role and potential of virtual reality to drive sales. Some are excited while others ask if it is a practical strategy if one already can leverage basic ecommerce selection, purchase and delivery.

Dan O'Shea in *Retail Dive* said on Monday that the two patents which Walmart has applied for together could translate into a customer using VR gear to browse products, pick out choices and buy items, while robots would do the fulfillment dance to prepare the chosen products for [shipping](#).

Matthew Boyle in Bloomberg described a user scenario. A shopper wearing VR headset and sensor-packed gloves shop Walmart via a 3-D representation of a Walmart store. Like anything? Then the consumer can [grab](#) an item, VR style, and it will be shipped from an automatic distribution center.

CB Insights explained how self-driving robots with articulated arms would locate items in a real warehouse, pick them up and place them in containers for [shipping](#).

These fulfillment centers would also utilize smart shelves to monitor inventory in real time, according to the [patent](#).

Some observers, however, were not ready to file the two patents under Great Ideas.

Cohen Coberly in *TechSpot* said it was unclear what practical purpose would be served. "Users can already buy virtually any product Walmart carries directly from its website, and that process is probably much faster than [walking](#) around a virtual store could ever be."

Jon Fingas in *Engadget* had commented earlier this year on VR and retail. "Most current VR shopping experiences are novelties—they're frequently about advertising more than helping you make informed [decisions](#). If Walmart can make VR shopping practical, even in niche cases, that could be a significant step forward."

Back in February *The Aleph Report* commented that "The most likely Amazon [nemesis](#) is called Walmart, and it's being spearheaded by one of the smartest minds in the retail space, Marc Lore. "

Boyle in Bloomberg said, "Walmart is moving aggressively into the digital realm at the same time that Amazon.com Inc. and other technology companies are looking to establish a brick-and-mortar presence."

Truly, one can see why an exciting move for Walmart would be to deliver a virtual showroom, if the system delivers more of a shopping experience than the usual fundamental industry practice of clicking on a photo, order form and waiting for your sleeping bag or shower curtain to arrive.

As CB Insights pointed out, in the virtual environments described in these patents, shoppers would get a 360-degree [perspective](#) on apparel, furniture, and other products, and test textures using the sensor-laden gloves.

A patent application discussion talked about sensory feedback that could include one or more of "weight, temperature, shape, texture, moisture, force, resistance, mass, density, size, sound, taste and smell."

Want a lawnmower? The discussion said sensory feedback could also "simulate a resistance of pushing the lawnmower and [sensory feedback](#) related to pushing the lawnmower uphill or downhill. In some

embodiments, the user can select for different environmental conditions, such as weather, indoor or outdoor conditions."

One *TechSpot* reader who commented has only one question. "Will I be able to see virtual customers get into fights in the VR store?"

- More information:** 1. [United States Patent application 2018/0232800](#)
2. [United States Patent application 2018/0231973](#)

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