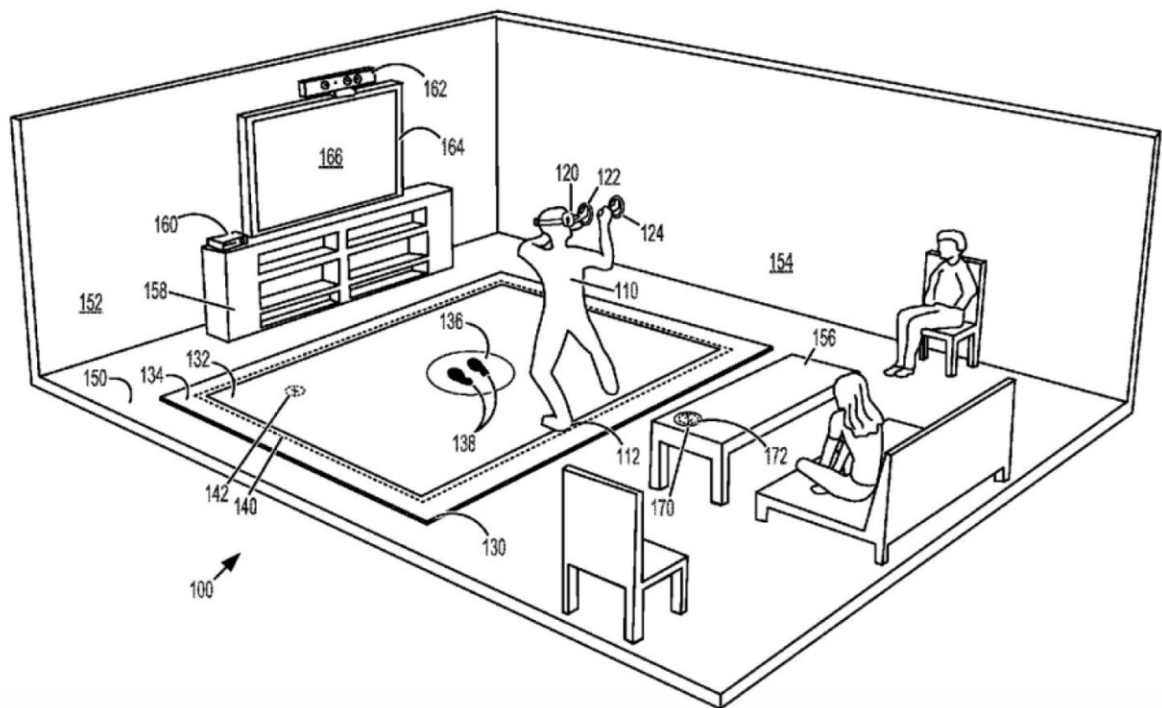


Microsoft patent filings raise chatter about Xbox VR

October 8 2019, by Nancy Cohen



Credit: United States Patent Application

A VR boundary mat. A motion controller. A stylus. These are new patent ideas that were spotted on Oct. 4 by a Twitter user. They have inspired anticipation as well as chatter amongst Microsoft watchers. Sure, not all patent ideas turn into products but in this instance, What If?

Not surprising: *Variety* asked Microsoft for comment and the result was that "A Microsoft spokesperson declined to comment."

The patent ideas made Microsoft watchers wonder if the patent filings had anything to do with what the Xbox team was cooking. *Variety* commented on the filing about the mat: "Interestingly, the application also makes a passing mention of an idea that has gotten less attention at Microsoft in recent years: In addition to working with a PC-based or standalone headset, the mat could also work with a VR system powered by Microsoft's Xbox, the document suggests."

The patent spotter was "[WalkingCat](#)."

Asher Madan covers gaming for *Windows Central* and wrote about the mat/stylus/[motion controller](#) patent filings. On to the patent idea for a motion controller. What's that all about? Madan said the patent discussion suggested the Xbox team may be developing a motion controller for the console. "You may be able to use it with one hand, while the other has a directional stick. For example, you can move around with a thumbstick, but if you're using a sword, you have to replicate the [motion](#)."

Madan said that same patent revealed "a stylus may be in development for the upcoming console." Stylus users, said Madan, might be able to play "Nintendo DS-like games on the device and lead to new experiences."

The patent application "Virtual Reality Floor Mat Activity Region" was filed back in April last year and was published by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on Oct. 3. The patent inventors named were Julia Schwarz and Jason Ray.

The application described "A [virtual reality system](#), comprising: an

optical sensor; a floor mat having one or more fiducial markers; and a computing system."

Janko Roettgers in *Variety* translated the concept into plain talk to say what the user would get from such an idea: "a [dedicated](#) floor mat for virtual reality (VR), which could help users avoid obstacles while wearing a headset."

Roettgers called out a real-world problem with immersion and obstacles: "VR provides full immersion, completely blocking out the outside world. That includes walls, coffee tables, shelves and other objects that a player may hit or bump into while playing a VR game." In 2017, a gamer [fell](#) through a glass table in a VR accident, for example.

Several sites reporting on the patent revelations made note that this would not be the first time the risk of real world collisions would be addressed. Roettgers pointed to the "guardian systems, which display [warning](#) messages when users leave the play space, or sometimes even make the VR world disappear completely."

This patent however, proposes a step up. Roettgers walked readers through the suggestions discussed in the patent. These included: markers used by a VR headset to recognize a mat, and adjust play space settings accordingly; a dedicated start position; players position their feet on foot markers in the middle of the mat to launch the VR experience; pressure sensors integrated into the mat to detect a physical pressure or force applied to an activity surface of the mat.

"At the very least, the patent application may point to a future when VR gamers can more safely play in their living rooms without punching their walls and breaking their glassware," he remarked.

What about the stylus? The patent under discussion was "Six DOF input

Device." A team of eight inventors were named in the application.

The [patent](#) discussion referred to "Input devices" that support user interactions. "As examples, two-dimensional translation of a computer mouse across a surface may cause two-dimensional translation of a cursor on a display, while a handheld controller equipped with an inertial measurement unit may provide three-dimensional input as the controller is manipulated throughout space."

Over to the mention of the stylus. Drawings in the filing included representations of a stylus and control of a virtual camera in a 3-D scene by the stylus.

MSPoweruser had more details on what the drawings represented, saying that "there's a figure showing a human hand holding a stylus along with a figure of a stylus apparently projecting a globe. The latter diagram is described as '[illustrating] the control of a virtual camera in a three-dimension scene.'"

Again—another site's hunch that this is all about Xbox things to come. The diagram description, said *MSPoweruser*, was "strongly implying that the Xbox Stylus is designed to work with virtual reality."

What's the deal with the Xbox guesses? This is, as *MSPoweruser* put it, intriguing. Microsoft had said, after all, that it did not plan to bring [VR](#) to the Xbox. "Could the company be planning on going back on its word?"

What word? A past [article](#) in *The Verge* had reported that Microsoft "pulled back on plans to support virtual reality headsets on the Xbox."

Well, *GamesRadar+*'s Alex Avard would just as soon cut to the chase: The discovered patents for motion controllers, stylus and boundary mat

could suggest a VR project for Xbox is in the works. Avar's guess: Xbox Project Scarlett "could come with a comprehensive set of [virtual reality accessories](#), including a boundary mat, stylus, and pair of motion controllers."

What is Xbox Project [Scarlett](#)? This is a next-generation console. *GamesRadar+* said the codename "will function as its official moniker until the real name of the next Xbox is unveiled."

More information: 1. Virtual reality floor mat activity region, [United States Patent Application 20190302879](#)

2. Six DOF input device, [US 2019/0302903 A1](#)

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