

How Pokémon Go Technology could help save lives

Earlier this year the Pokémon Go game was launched and quickly became one of the most downloaded applications for smartphones in history. In the process it also introduced augmented reality into the public consciousness. But augmented reality is more than just a clever piece of technology that entertains people; it can also have serious applications that can benefit society. An innovative small tech company Aligned Assets, based in Woking, Surrey, has developed a practical application for augmented reality for use within the public sector, with further versions for the private sector to follow.

Whenever staff from the emergency services or social services visit an address, a lack of knowledge of what is at that address could be putting them at risk. Perhaps it is occupied by someone who has previously demonstrated aggressive behaviour to someone in uniform. Perhaps there is a dangerous animal such as an aggressive dog, or the building contains hazardous materials. There could be vulnerable people living in or near the property, whose safety needs to be prioritised. Equally relevant would be the presence of potential hazards in neighbouring properties. For instance, if flammable or explosive materials are held in an adjacent property, firefighters handling a fire will want to know about them. Being aware of these factors before entering a property can help reduce such risks. The visitor can approach the visit with extra caution or make necessary adjustments to the way they enter the property.

Such vital information may already be held within the service's IT system, but the staff member will need to be informed, or make a specific request for information from a control room or system administrator. If they fail to make that request or someone fails to inform them of a particular risk, that information will be wasted.

And this is where augmented reality can help. Address-management specialist Aligned Assets has developed an augmented reality application that enables someone on the ground to visualise these hazards as images that are superimposed on the actual properties they are viewing. The app operates on an Android platform so the user can view it via smart glasses, a tablet or simply a smart phone, according to the particular situation.

The picture above shows what a visitor from the emergency or social services might see, when using the app to view a property they were about to enter



The visitor can see all the information recorded about the property and any other property within a range that they choose. The image and related hazard or risk is pinned to the relevant property. If a property contains explosive material, this is instantly visible. This real-time visual information gives a person a more immediate sense of any potential hazards than would be provided by a conventional data system or a paper map.

The same piece of information can be provided written or printed on a piece of paper, or as an entry in a computer system. This can be further enhanced by it appearing on a map, the perspective developing from one dimension (a single line) to two dimensions. But augmented reality takes the information to the next stage, placing it in a three-dimensional context. The human mind will intuitively process it in context and use it to make more informed decisions. Augmented reality's pictorial nature also helps convey a lot of information very quickly. And the information is likely to be more up to date as it will be retrieved from a central repository of the most current information at the moment the user needs it.

In the case of the ambulance service, a member of staff will be able to use augmented reality to determine if there was a threat to their safety from a dangerous dog and call for assistance before entering the property. Or better understand the medical condition of a resident at an early stage, possibly saving valuable time when assessing a plan of action. Having all this information to hand while on site provides a more effective solution than other methods currently being used.

Inevitably the adoption of such a system could lead to concerns of an increasing 'Big Brother' style surveillance society. But all the information this app uses is already held by the relevant services. It simply uses it more effectively.

The adoption of augmented reality into our increasingly technology driven world seems unstoppable, and previous hardware and software limitations have significantly improved. Aligned Assets' simple yet innovative solution will allow its customers to deliver real social benefit.

For more information, please visit:
www.aligned-assets.co.uk/products/symphony-ar/