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Angel-Funded GoldRun Helps Nike Augment Its Reality

João-Pierre S. Ruth | 12/12/11 | [Leave a Comment](#) | [Follow @jpruth](#)

Shoppers with iPhones will be able to discover Nike products in a virtual way at Finish Line stores today, thanks to technology from GoldRun in New York. GoldRun raised \$1.2 million in a seed round last April with a plan to conquer an emerging field: augmented reality, which is technology that adds images, sounds, or contextual information to content viewed on mobile devices. The company's idea is to help brands virtually insert their products into consumers' lives.

GoldRun CEO and co-founder Vivian Rosenthal says her company's technology put virtual Nike Air Max shoes inside Finish Line stores for the new promotional campaign that shoppers can only see by using the cameras on their mobile devices.

It's an idea that's quickly gaining traction in the advertising and media industries. GoldRun has already landed work with Ford, HBO's *True Blood* series, and retailer H&M, among others. With the help of GoldRun's technology, these brands are creating virtual experiences for their customers and fans.

For example, viewers of *True Blood* can download the free GoldRun app from Apple's iTunes App Store and use it to insert the characters in the show into photos they take with the smartphone's camera. "Fans can be watching the show and take a photo with one of the characters on their couch," says Rosenthal.

Users can also search their own surroundings with their iPhone cameras for images placed virtually in designated geographic areas on behalf of GoldRun's clients. That could include shoes, dresses, or other objects. The app also lets users superimpose a product they may want—such as a new car—in a photo



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taken of an empty driveway.

Rosenthal says augmented reality offers marketers a way to reach customers in the real world that goes beyond the check-in model made popular by Foursquare. “A check-in from a brand or advertising perspective doesn’t bring that much value because it’s not visually driven,” she says. The limitations of other technology, she adds, motivated her to create GoldRun. “I realized advertising agencies and brands needed a platform where they weren’t spending tons of money and time developing one-off apps,” she says.

With augmented reality, Rosenthal says, brands can connect the social experience with a visual experience. “It can be any kind of product, message, or content as a virtual layer on top of reality,” she says. GoldRun, she says, can also tie the images to rewards such as discounts or the option to buy products.

GoldRun charges each client by the number of “hot zones” it establishes. These are geographic locations, such as stores, sporting events, or music events, where users can find virtual content with the app. GoldRun also charges for the number of objects that clients make available for user interaction. Rosenthal’s company provides its clients with analytics on who is taking the photos and how they are being shared.

Other players in augmented reality include Britain’s Autonomy, which developed the Aurasma visual browser, and Amsterdam’s **Layar**. Palo Alto, CA-based HP acquired Autonomy in October for more than \$10 billion. Aurasma lets users discover video content by pointing their smartphone or tablet cameras at pictures and objects in the real world. During a demo at the October NY Tech Meetup, the company showed how a photo on the front page of a newspaper could trigger a related online video.

Rosenthal got on the path to the augmented reality world while working on a master’s thesis on the intersection of digital and physical space at Columbia University’s architecture school. “There was a senior person from Nike on the [thesis] jury and they were thinking about developing the first robust 3-D e-commerce site,” she says.

Rosenthal and her grad school partner, Jesse Seppi, co-founded New York’s Tronic Studio, a digital design and media studio, in 2001—one day after graduation—so they could work with Nike. Rosenthal, who remains an equity owner in Tronic Studio, started GoldRun in October 2010 when she saw the potential to monetize augmented reality on GPS-enabled smartphones. “Your city becomes the chessboard and you’re the chess piece,” she says. Rosenthal brought GoldRun co-founder Shai Rao, executive editor at Surface magazine, onboard shortly after launching the company.

GoldRun is looking to raise a Series A round within the next five months, Rosenthal says. She hopes to use the funding to flesh out GoldRun’s staff with more sales and technical personnel. GoldRun is developing a new version of the app and plans to release a version for Android devices in early 2012.

Rosenthal believes her app can help brands and retailers extend their presence beyond their stores and the Web to reach consumers anytime and anywhere through their smartphones. “We’re turning the fans of a brand into brand ambassadors,” she says.

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João-Pierre S. Ruth is a correspondent for Xconomy based in the New York City area. He can be reached at jpruth@xconomy.com and followed on Twitter @jpruth.

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