



BUSINESS

Pokemon Go is augmented reality with potential for Memphis businesses



January 8, 2016 — Craig Kelly (center) talks with fellow panel members as they discuss the growing role and potential uses for augmented reality technology, with special focus on the success of the mobile device game Pokémon GO, during a panel discussion at the FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis. (Brandon Dill/Special to The Commercial Appeal)



January 8, 2016 – Panel members (from left) Devitt Upkins, George Deitz, Cody Behles, Andrew Olney, Craig

By *Kevin McKenzie* of *The Commercial Appeal*

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The El Mezcal restaurant at Wolf River Boulevard and Houston Levee in Collierville and a neighboring TCBY frozen yogurt store are exciting young people like never before.



special focus on the success of the mobile device game Pokémon GO, during a panel discussion at the FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis. (Brandon Dill/Special to The Commercial Appeal)



January 8, 2016 — Mark Lane (left) talks with his son Billy Lane, 10, and daughter Chloe Lane, 9, as they play video games during a panel discussion at the FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis to discuss the growing role and potential uses for augmented reality technology, with special focus on the success of the mobile device game Pokémon GO. (Brandon Dill/Special to The Commercial Appeal)

doors.

The popular game, launched last month, allows fans of the 20-year-old Pokemon gaming, trading card, television and movie franchise to use their smartphones to discover and catch virtual "pocket monsters" in real-world locations.

Far from a fad to be dismissed, Pokemon Go and its mix of virtual and real worlds shows the power of a technology ready to be harnessed for business, education, training, engineering, architecture, and interior design — not to mention similar games, experts say.

"I do think it's a potentially disruptive technology, in the sense that even though it's just a game, I think it's setting expectations for how people should interact with businesses and other elements of the environment," said George Deitz, a University of Memphis marketing and supply chain management department professor.

"Whether you want to be in that area or in that game or not, I think you have to be cognizant that increasingly, especially with the younger generation, their expectations as consumers are going to be at a higher innovative level," said Deitz, also director of the Customer Neuroinsights Research Lab.

Dietz was one of six panelists last week that the university's FedEx Institute of Technology, in partnership with the Memphis Gaming Development Group of the Memphis Technology Foundation, marshaled to discuss Pokemon Go and augmented reality.

At El Mezcal, assistant manager George Gomez said the restaurant had no idea why excited young people began showing up at the restaurant, which has four schools in the area. They had become a "PokeStop," a real location where players can find virtual items for the game and where concentrations of Pokemon can be lured.



In fact, the California software company that developed Pokemon Go, a Google spinoff called Niantic, Inc., made PokeStops of real-world locations submitted by players in another of its augmented reality games, Ingress.

"People went out and they took pictures of interest in their neighborhoods and they submitted those to the nodes in Ingress and that's why you have the parks, and churches, and weird street signs at Best Buy as PokeStops now," said Justin Palmer, a 27-year-old information technology worker who attended the FedEx Institute discussion.

Palmer said he knows of the street sign that made a PokeStop of the Best Buy at 58121 Poplar near Interstate 240 because he submitted it as a "portal" in the Ingress game.

FanBank is a Memphis shop-local rewards program launched in 2014 that quickly harnessed the Pokemon Go craze for local business owners who don't have the time to figure it out themselves, said Lauren Lee, FanBank market manager and a former television reporter.

"What it's doing is giving them a chance to attract people that may not have come in before and we've seen a lot of success with the businesses that are right on top of the PokeStops, like Newby's, Cafe Keough, Celtic Crossing, The Arcade — these are all places that you can actually sit inside the restaurant or bar and catch Pokemon," Lee said.

FanBank sets "lures," which the game offers for 99 cents per half-hour and can only be set at the PokeStops determined by the game.

"For 30 minutes you get tons of Pokemon and so it's a lure for Pokemon, but the side effect obviously is luring people and that's what these businesses obviously want."

With about 30 firms involved, this marked the third weekend of FanBank's strategy of setting three hours worth of lures, preceded by a targeted Facebook advertising.



some advertising in a way that's going to catch their eye and alert them to these locally owned businesses," Lee said.

Businesses capitalizing on PokeStops within three weeks saw a 25 increase in revenue, according to information released for the panel discussion, part of the monthly FedEx Institute of Emerging Innovation Series.

While the game makes millions of users more familiar with augmented reality, panelists at the university said the spread of virtual reality technology also is bound to give expectations and development a boost.

Holding up a smartphone to get information about museum exhibits being viewed, details about aging equipment being repaired on a Navy ship, or more detail while doing textbook homework were a few of the examples that experts gave for the future of augmented reality.

Ernest McCracken, a panelist and application architect for IBM, said that retailers will jump in after one takes the leap.

"Let's say Wal-Mart does this to where you can hold your phone up on a product and it will show you all this information about it, or you put it on your phone you're looking for something and it shows you a marker in the store where to go to, and all of the sudden Target says, 'Oh, we need to do that now,' " McCracken said. "And all of the sudden, bam, it's everywhere."



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