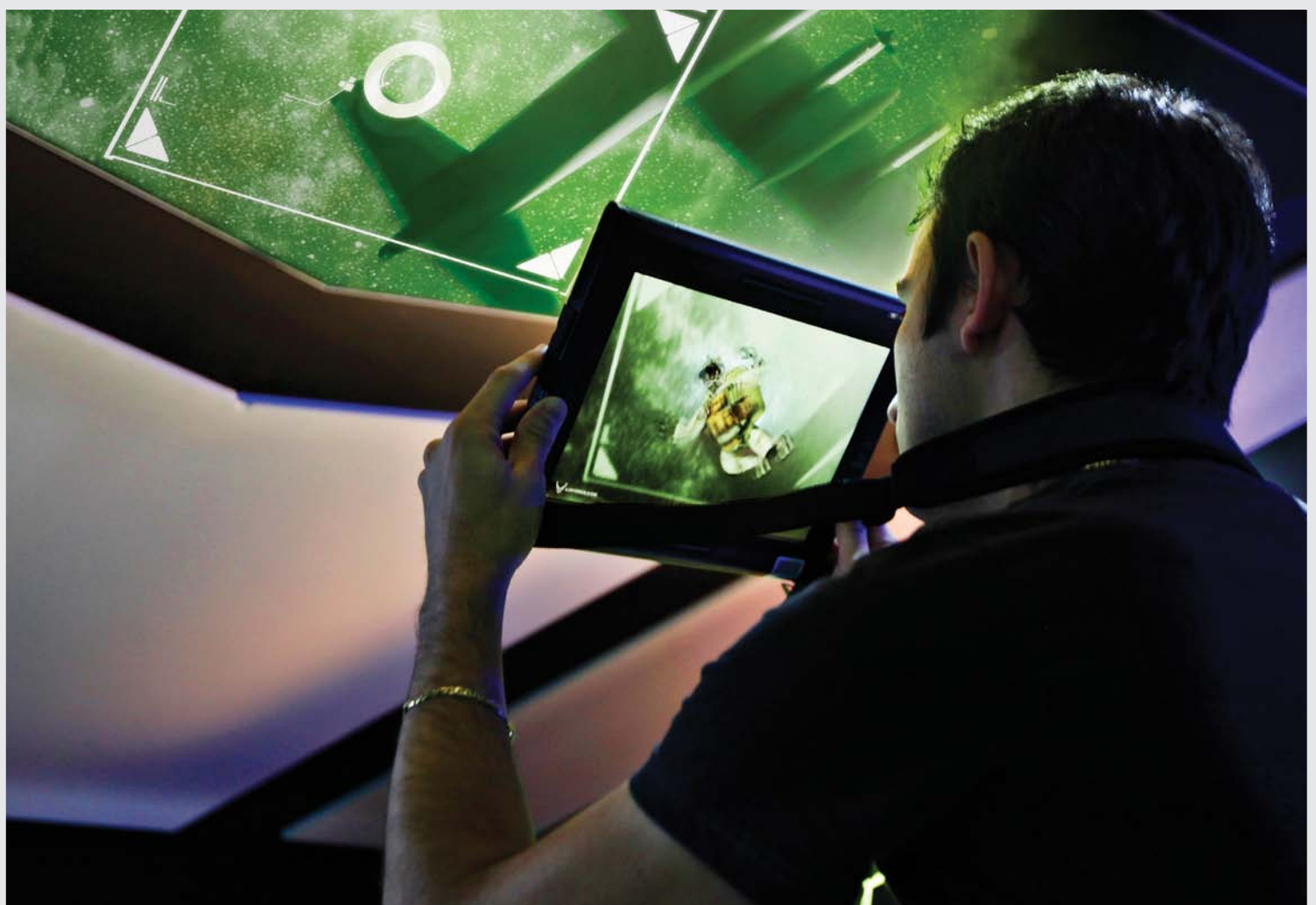


**Total Immersion** / The AR bandwagon is currently heaving, but can you really blame those who have chosen not to jump on but rather to wait and see which brave and rich new territories it rolls into? Leading the convoy by example is software specialist **Total Immersion** / **By Will Sansom** /

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Let's start with a stat, shall we? It is estimated that by 2012, between 150 and 200 million people worldwide will be using Augmented Reality (AR) applications on mobile devices, compared to just 600,000 in 2010 (Perey Research & Consulting, Montreux). As potentially mind-boggling as this prediction is, there is no doubt that its validity will polarise opinion in much the same way as AR technology itself has so far – particularly in the world of digital marketing where innovation and cold, hard ROI can at times seem unlikely bedfellow.

Indeed, since it first burst forth from our screens in all its angular 3D glory a few years ago, AR has resulted in some of the most ground-breaking and yet simultaneously fruitless digital marketing campaigns to have crossed *Contagious'* radar. Too many, unfortunately, seem to have had AR elements bolted on for sheer novelty rather than for any tangible consumer benefit. James Hilton is co-founder and chief creative officer of global interactive agency, AKQA – itself responsible for some of the more productive applications of AR in marketing. He remains, however, cautious about how and where it should be used.

'There's always a danger of doing something stupid. Mum always said "just because you can, doesn't mean you should." Although it's fair to point out her wisdom wasn't referring to AR, but to my potential premature career as a 15-year-old father. Luckily, back then, I listened. And so, as unwitting adolescents lurch from one ill-conceived (or un-conceived) idea to the next, so too do marketers. At least those who never listened to their mums do. Because whilst something is new and full of possibilities, it doesn't necessarily follow that you should go anywhere near it. Until, that is, it's a natural thing to do. The point is a great idea will find a relevant home without too much effort. Idea first, application second. Am I concerned there aren't that many great applications for AR yet? Not at all, it's just another answer waiting for the right question.

The increase in smartphone and tablet penetration is one reason to have faith in the growth of AR; UK-based Juniper Research has predicted that the number of AR-capable smartphones in the global market will more than double, from 91 million in 2010 to over 197 million in 2012. Furthermore, according to research performed by Gartner, by 2014 30% of mobile subscribers with data plans in mature markets will use AR at least once a week. The reason for this will be the reduction in friction afforded by such devices, with users no longer tied to a desktop PC but plugged into the web via a series of more targeted, location-based applications. For brands

and marketers, however, the challenge will ultimately remain the same – albeit with bigger audiences and higher stakes: how to use AR to meaningfully affect the user-experience in a way which is useful, relevant or entertaining.

### D'Fusion line

There are, of course, examples which have defied even the most cynical amongst us (Topp's AR baseball cards which brought each player to life in your hands being a particular *Contagious* favourite) and of these, a surprising number can be credited to software company Total Immersion – widely acknowledged as a world leader in AR solutions.

Founded in Paris in 1999, Total Immersion was the brainchild of Bruno Uzzan, formerly an auditing consultant at Pierre Henri Scacchi & Associates (Price Waterhouse Group), and defence software engineer Valentin Lefevre. It was Uzzan's business vision combined with Lefevre's applied knowledge of digital imaging which provided an appealing prospect for investors, as Total Immersion secured venture rounds in 2001 and again in 2006. Today, the company employs 70 staff across offices in Paris, Los Angeles, London and Hong Kong. As a privately-owned business, Total Immersion does not publish any financial results; however, what they did reveal to *Contagious* was that revenue had increased by 34% from 2009 to 2010. This rapid growth is also evident in the total number of projects undertaken: in 2008 Total Immersion worked on 100 different campaigns; by 2009 this had tripled to over 300 and at present, the company is involved in approximately 600 projects worldwide.

Bruno Uzzan, who acts as CEO, explains how the perception of AR technology has changed in the marketing industry in the past five years. 'As the founder of Total Immersion, I was one of the first individuals to pitch AR into various industries and the reaction was almost always the same: "Wow this is great but we have no idea how we would use it". As a result, we had to spend many years evangelising the technology in what was essentially a non-mature market. However, in 2006 we realised that of all the areas we were looking into, there was by far the strongest interest amongst digital marketers – it was for these people that the concept of merging 3D products into a real environment seemed most appealing.

'In the beginning we had to not just pitch augmented reality, but also to pitch an experience – how AR could be applied to the specific product or brand. Sometimes it's not enough to just go there and show the technology