

21096 **The tech industry is looking to replace the smartphone — and everybody is waiting to see what Apple comes up with**

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In 2007, Apple unveiled the iPhone.

Apple didn't invent the smartphone — companies like Palm and Blackberry had been selling them for years. But the iPhone introduced a totally new way to interact with computers. The always-on internet connectivity, finger-friendly touch screen, and interface based around clickable app icons all seem commonplace now. But at the time, the whole package felt revolutionary.

But smartphone sales have dropped two calendar years straight for the first time. Smartphones are old news.

The tech industry's next bet is a series of technologies usually called augmented reality (AR) or mixed reality. The vision usually involves some kind of computer worn in front of the user's eyes.

Users will still be able to see most of the real world in front of them — unlike virtual reality, which completely immerses the user in a computer-generated fantasyland, augmented reality layers computer-generated text and images on top of reality.

Industry watchers and participants think that Apple has a good chance to validate and revolutionize AR like it did with smartphones. Apple has been prototyping headsets for years, and recent reports suggest that Apple could release a headset as early as 2022 that could cost as much as \$3,000.

But Apple's not the only company working on these products. All the big tech players — Microsoft, Google, Facebook, and Amazon — are in the game as well.

Futurists and screenwriters have conjured blue-sky visions of what could happen with advanced computer glasses — one episode of the dystopian anthology "Black Mirror" explored a world where people could "block" certain people out of their view. More positive visions imagine having important information coming directly into your view, exactly when you want it.

Today, the most common use cases are much more mundane, including smartphone-based games and apps like Pokemon Go or Apple's Ruler app, which use the phone's screen and camera rather than relying on glasses or another set of screens sitting on your face. The few companies who are actively producing AR glasses are mostly focused on work scenarios, like manufacturing and medicine.

"That's where we now sit in spatial computing's lifecycle," said Mike Boland, technology analyst and founder of ARtillery Intelligence, in a recent report. "It's not a silver bullet for everything we do in life and work as once hyped. But it will be transformative in narrower ways, and within a targeted set of use cases."

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