

Augmented Reality Draws Respect From Investors

By JACK NICAS

Virtual reality gets the buzz, but its less-immersive cousin—augmented reality—also is attracting investment and spawning new products.

Two small Silicon Valley companies are releasing electronic glasses that show workers a digital display in their field of view. They are getting a slight jump on similar augmented-reality devices from **Microsoft Corp.** and **Google** parent **Alphabet Inc.**

Entertainment giant **21st Century Fox Inc.** said Tuesday that it bought an undisclosed stake in one of the augmented-reality firms, Osterhout Design Group, to push “the film experience into the future.”

San Francisco-based Osterhout Design last month began shipping \$2,750 headsets that resemble sunglasses and display partly transparent digital screens. **Atheer Inc.**, of Mountain View, Calif., plans by April to ship \$4,000 headsets that resemble ski goggles and can be controlled with waves of the hand.

For now, augmented-reality devices are aimed at business users. Augmented-reality

glasses can show a patient's vital signs to a surgeon or tell a warehouse worker which boxes need to be moved. Osterhout Design said **Caterpillar Inc.** is testing its glasses for mechanics repairing construction equipment. Atheer says engineers who build missiles are testing its glasses.

Google is remaking its Glass devices for commercial customers, after it discontinued the consumer version last year. Microsoft says it will first target business and government users, including U.S. astronauts, with its HoloLens headset, which is expected to ship to developers this quarter for \$3,000 each.

The 21st Century Fox investment shows interest in consumer uses of augmented-reality devices as well. Until mid-2013, Fox was part of Wall Street Journal parent **News Corp.**

A recent demo illustrated how Osterhout Design's glasses can show a slightly transparent 65-inch screen floating about 8 feet away from the user. Wearers see vibrant three-dimensional images that aren't visible to bystanders and can do so without losing track of their surroundings.

Magic Leap Inc., a Dania Beach, Fla., startup building augmented-reality glasses for

consumers, last month filed documents that said it was seeking as much as \$827 million in funding. That could value it at roughly \$3.7 billion, the documents say.

Millions of consumers are expected to try virtual reality this year on headsets scheduled to be released in coming months by **Sony Corp.**, **HTC Corp.** and **Facebook Inc.**'s Oculus unit.

Augmented reality, however, is likely still years away from widespread adoption—in part because the technology is more challenging.

Virtual reality immerses users in experiences that appear to be all around them, generally by tapping into smartphones, game consoles or high-end computers.

Augmented-reality glasses are typically stand-alone devices, with less computing power and shorter battery life, which are important considerations in keeping the devices lightweight and affordable.

Over time, tech companies want the devices to understand the physical world around them to provide users with relevant information about their surroundings. That could include, for instance, showing reviews when a user looks at a restaurant. That will require far more sophisticated sensors, software and artificial intelligence.

Another hurdle, exposed by the struggles of Google's first version of Glass: People are loath to wear computers on their faces. Virtual reality appears to be skirting this issue because it is used intermittently.

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Ford's Mark Fields at the Consumer Electronics Show. The firm will use a lidar sensor from Velodyne.

Ford Accelerates Its Mobility Push

By MIKE RAMSEY

LAS VEGAS—**Ford Motor Co.** Chief Executive Mark Fields said the company would continue to invest heavily in its core business while it diversifies into “transportation services” beginning in 2016.

Mr. Fields, speaking at the Consumer Electronics Show, said starting this year, “you are going to see us change pretty dramatically, becoming an auto and mobility company.”

“You will see us focus more attention on the transportation-services sector, even as we maintain our emphasis on our core automotive business,” he added.

Mr. Fields said the transportation-services sector, which includes buses, cabs and passenger rail, generates \$5.4 trillion in annual revenue.

“Ford and all industry competitors receive virtually no revenue today” from that sector, he said.

Comparatively, new-vehicle sales generate \$2.3 trillion in revenue annually.

While Ford has been running experiments with mobility services, including ride-sharing and pay-by-mile rental vehicles, it hasn't launched a full-scale effort in the area. Mr. Fields said the company isn't interested in becoming a contract manufacturer for another company, an important detail as companies like Google Inc. and Apple Inc. consider getting into the auto industry and may be looking for partners.

Mr. Fields, in responding to whether Ford would need to form a new subsidiary or company to make a strategic investment in ride-sharing, said that “we are open to all possi-

bilities.”

General Motors Co. said Sunday that it has invested \$500 million in Lyft Inc., the ride-sharing company that is trying to take on industry leader Uber Technologies Inc.

Ford offered few specifics about its plan to push into mobility services, but said it is increasing its resources into autonomous vehicle technology.

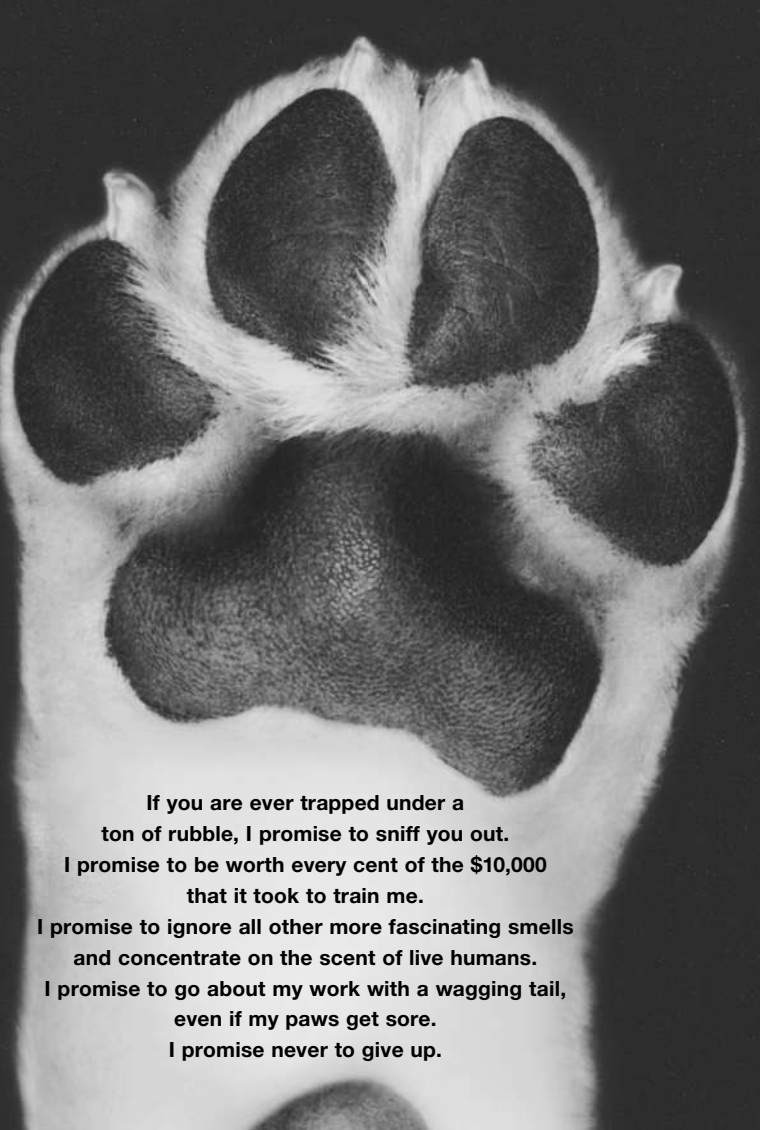
The company is tripling its fleet of research vehicles run autonomously, though the company didn't give any timeline for making an offering for sale.

Ford will be using a new lidar sensor from Morgan Hill, Calif.-based **Velodyne Acoustics** that can be hidden in side-view mirrors. It would replace the clunky spinning sensors found on the roofs of autonomous cars.



Osterhout's headsets display partly transparent digital screens.

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