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Google and Ray-Ban deal to offer 'more stylish' Glass

Google is teaming up with the designer firm behind Ray-Ban and Oakley in an attempt to make its wearable technology desirable beyond the "geek" community.

The tie-up with Italian eyewear designer Luxottica will create "avant-garde" design according to the fashion firm.

Google hopes it will put Glass at the forefront of the "smart eyewear market".

But many remain sceptical about its future as a mainstream device.

Glass is a piece of wearable technology that includes a thumbnail-sized screen above the wearer's right eye to view internet content. The gadget also includes a camera that can take hands-free pictures and video.

Combining Luxottica's well-known brands with "the cutting edge technology expertise of Google" could "give birth to a new generation of revolutionary devices", said the eyewear company's chief executive Andrea Guerra.

"The first collection generated by this partnership will combine high-end technology with avant-garde design," he added.

Google is to use the 5,000 stores that Luxottica runs in the US to help sell Glass once the device is released on the general market.

There were no details about price or availability.

Cheaper version

Critics point out that Glass remains beyond the reach of many consumers with its \$1,500 (£900) price tag.

"The price needs to come down and I think that when they launch a consumer device it is going to be much cheaper," said Nitin Bhas, a senior analyst with Juniper Research.

But he thinks tie-ups such as these will also be crucial.

"Google needs multiple frames to make Glass look more stylish and move it beyond the tech-savvy audience," he said.

IDC analyst Francisco Jeronimo added: "Nobody will pay \$1,500 for this type of device."

He estimates Glass will fall to between £300 (\$495) and £500 and come with additional features.

Mainstream hopes

It is not the first time that Google has attempted to get interest in Glass beyond its core geek audience.

In January it announced that versions of the headset would be available in prescription glasses and sunglasses - known as the Titanium collection.

Google has so far only sold Glass to a select group of test subjects known as "Explorers." More than 10,000 people have bought it to date.

As early adopters, they have not always had an easy ride when wearing the device with some wearers earning the dubious title "Glassholes".

Cecilia Abadie was pulled over and given a traffic ticket for wearing the device while another user was removed from a cinema and accused of using the gadget to illegally copy the film.

Recently Google issued guidelines on Glass etiquette, urging wearers not to be "creepy or rude (aka a 'Glasshole')".

Last week it attempted to dispel "Glass myths" including privacy fears.

"If someone wants to secretly record you, there are much, much better cameras out there than one you wear conspicuously on your face and that lights up every time you give a voice command, or press a button," it said.

Google appears to be committed to next-generation wearables.

Last week, it unveiled a version of its Android operating system designed specifically for such devices.

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