



Sears My Virtual Model Experience for shopping online

Shopping Girls Gone Virtual

Remember those good old days when we'd go to a store, try on clothes, determine the right size and colour, then get on the Internet and order it cheaper online? For the most part, this worked pretty well. The problem is that our lives are so busy and gas is so expensive, wouldn't it be great if we could see what clothes will look like on us without leaving home? Well, we can—sort of, anyway.

Pictured above is one of the first virtual shopping sites. This is the Sears online Virtual Model Experience. You customize your “personal model” with your height, weight, hair colour, etc., then “try-on” the clothes you like, and buy them on the spot. Although the shopping is virtual, unfortunately the money is for real.



Picture of yourself uploaded on the Internet

Clothing added to your real picture

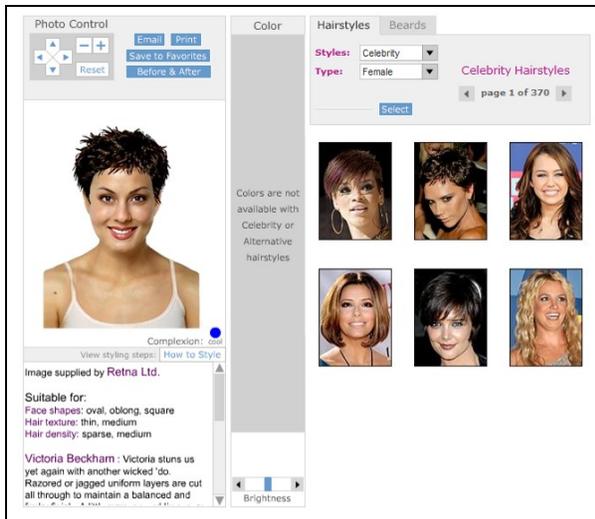
Future Shopping: Upload, try on, select, buy

The problem with virtual model sites is that no matter how much you tweak the model, it still doesn't look like you. You're just too unique to fit within the model's limited parameters. But, what if you could upload your picture to see how an outfit would look on you? Well, you can, or will be able to soon.

A Japanese company (Avielan) has developed software that allows customers to upload their own pictures. You have to take the prescribed pose: standing, face forward, arms down not touching your body, etc. It

may take a few times before you get it right, but it sure seems better than using the cartoon avatars that are on some Japanese clothing sites. So get your cameras out. You may be able to be your own online model soon.





Virtual Hair Styler: www.thehairstyler.com

The Virtual Hair Stylist

Enough clothing shopping for the day. You've got an appointment to get your hair done. You want something really different but can't make up your mind. And all those pictures of beautiful models doesn't really give you much of an idea how you will look in that short spiky cut. If only you could try out a variety of cuts before turning yourself over to the stylist. Well, you can and it's a lot of fun.

There are a number of virtual hair style sites. You can start out with a picture of a model who looks like you or upload your own picture. You can click on various styles until your nails crack. Print out a picture of your choice and give it to your stylist.

Of course your hair is only the beginning. You can try out virtual lipstick, eyeliner, blush, and, if you're going for that Britney look, sunglasses.



Real Shopping | Virtual Workers

Retail is one of the most competitive industries. Merchants keep cutting costs wherever they can to increase profit margins. They



New Japanese barcodes are at least entertaining.

have little control over certain costs such as stores and warehouses, merchandise and utilities. The one large expense that is the most flexible is labour.

Consequently, nearly all merchants will do almost anything to cut personnel. We've all seen grocery stores and hardware stores reduce real checkers and add self-checkout stations. We've all had to get used to finding the barcode on a package and swiping it repeatedly over the laser thingy until the not so smart machines reward us with a dulcet ding. Soon, we'll have to butter our own popcorn at the movies—oh, we already have to do that.

Shoppers in many grocery stores are already expected to weigh, price and tag produce. New automated weighing machines use digital cameras to identify whether you're weighing a banana or melon and will then generate a barcode to be swiped.

So new technology now helps the customer to do the job someone else used to get paid to do. Welcome to the future.

Future Shopping | Key Terms

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| barcode | A code consisting of a series of vertical bars printed on a package or label that provides the price and other information related to a product. |
| dulcet | Sweet to the ear, harmonious. |
| prescribed | Formally required action or procedures. |
| profit margin | A way to describe the profit percentage. Net profit after taxes is divided by net sales. |
| virtual | Simulation of a real experience. "The boy spends much of his days playing Dungeons and Dragons in a virtual world." |

Discussion Points

1. Buying clothing on a virtual shopping site might be handy and fun. But do you have faith that the clothes will actually look on you the way they look on the site? What would you never purchase from a virtual shopping site?
2. Virtual clothing, makeup, and hair styling sites are fun and might be useful. Is there any other shopping experience that you think might work well as a virtual site?
3. Many retail stores are introducing automated systems that reduce labour costs and put more responsibility on the shopper. Do you know of examples of stores cutting labour costs that go beyond self-checkout?