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Augmented reality company to make WKU Innovation Campus regional HQ

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A San Fransisco-based software company specializing in augmented reality and immersive technologies is setting up its regional headquarters in Bowling Green.

MyXR, which creates platforms on which these kinds of technologies can be used, will be the newest addition to Western Kentucky University's Innovation Campus. The move will create 60 full-time jobs.

Augmented reality is any way in which a technological device helps enhance the real, physical world, by adding context, meaning or depth to what a person is looking at, said Sam Ford, Innovation and Culture Fellow at WKU Innovation Campus.

Augmented reality might be a new term for many, but augmented reality technologies are already at play in workplaces and daily life through smartphones, Ford said.

For everyday examples, think about apps like Snapchat or TikTok that allow users to take photos with special filters or Pokémon Go, which virtually added cartoon characters to a physical space through a phone screen.

This technology can also be used in a variety of other scenarios and spaces. Buddy Steen, CEO of the WKU Innovation Campus, used a motor as an example.

Say you're working on a motor and need to find the right screw with the right amount of torque, or twisting force, to make the whole system run smoothly.

"Typically, what you do is you would go over to the manual, and you would search through the manual page, and you would find the motor, you'd find the bolt, and then you'd find the

torque setting, and then you'd get your torque wrench," Steen said. "That takes time."

With this technology, Steen could put on a pair of augmented reality glasses or goggles, look at the bolt, and immediately the technology would tell him everything he needed to know to fix the motor.

"Tech manuals, maintenance, things that you're doing that you'd have to recollect information – that information will be available immediately," he said.

The technology MyXR is developing could also be used at live events, museums, tourist sites or college campuses to increase engagement by bringing certain aspects of the space to – virtual – life.

"It really applies to everything," Steen said. "It applies to business, it could apply to sports, it could apply to education, lots of different things. And so we're really excited about that, because as these technologies start to take hold, then MyXR will sort of evolve into those things."

In several ways, Bowling Green is the perfect location for MyXR's regional headquarters, Steen said.

First, it's 45 minutes north of Nashville. Companies can benefit from the economic and population growth expanding into Bowling Green while avoiding the higher expenses and more competitive labor market in Nashville, Steen said.

Second, the WKU Innovation Campus has an Immersive Experience Innovation Lab with subject matter experts ranging from cyber defense to architecture to storytelling, which creates an ecosystem able to support the growth of a technology company like MyXR.

Third, WKU has a four-year engineering program focusing on problem-solving skills, a key skill for future industries even more so than learning specific technological languages.

"It's very good timing for us," Steen said.

Before Bowling Green was announced as the regional headquarter location, it was joined by Detroit and Austin as finalists. In a

news release, MyXR CEO Hans Koch said that choosing Kentucky was easy.

"The Kentucky public and private communities have given us both a welcome mat and a playbook for growing our business, delivering better service and software, and an opportunity to create a world-class corporate hub for our company," Koch said.

Steen said those hired by MyXR, whether from WKU or somewhere else, will help enhance the community's culture.

"They bring their wealth, they bring their talent and they bring their network. Connecting it into our ecosystem benefits everyone," he said. "It's our mission to increase the overall standard of living both economically and culturally in Bowling Green, and MyXR helps us do that."

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