GOOGLE GLASS

By Wes Brandi

Writer Wes Brandi modeling Google Glasses, courtesy of Dr. Steve Jacobs and Professor Hall hooking up this pair for him to try. Lenses come only in glass, no prescriptions currently available.

Google Glass is a wearable computer device with a head-mounted display. It's likely you've read an article about this latest tech 'phenom', seen a celebrity rocking a pair or noticed a mention in the Dilbert comic strip.

They sit on your face like any glasses, but these can interact with the Internet via natural language voice commands with the use of Google's Android operating system 4.0.3 (Ice Cream Sandwich) or higher. The user can control the interface by swiping the touchpad on the right side of the frame. It packs Wi-Fi (802.11b/g) and Bluetooth connectivity along with 12GB of usable memory, synced with Google cloud storage. There is a micro USB connector used for charging and listening via a new mono earbud. Google Glass can instantly record a 720 P video (or snap a 5 MP pic) with a simple voice command or a wink of the eye.

Google Glass is not widely available yet. At $1,500 a pop, many who were invited to be testers declined. Ralph Hall, assistant professor of in the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech, was one of the lucky ones to snatch a pair, and he gave me an opportunity to check them out. I am not quite head over heals for the gadget. Sure, they can do a TON of cool things, but so can my iPhone 4. The glasses gave me a little headache and felt heavy. It looks like a small projection screen is directly in front of your right eye, so I get it that in several states it's against the law to drive while wearing them.

"One of the most beneficial aspects of Google Glass is the network of innovative people that the device brings together," Hall explains. Since becoming an "explorer," he has led the creation of a VT Glass community which is working on ways to use the technology in research and teaching. He has been using it to communicate with students, like sharing his reasoning behind assignment grades through short videos. He can say "record video" while at his desk critiquing a paper and verbally and visually explain why someone got a certain grade, all privately with hardly any set up time.

Another advantage to Google Glass is its likelihood of creating more jobs. There is a Glass App store, where new apps are being created every day by talented minds trying out new breakthrough ideas. Research positions devoted to Google Glass app development have already been created at Virginia Tech. Hall is optimistic that VT will be at the leading edge of applying Google Glass in an educational setting.

There are privacy concerns, as it can be recording anywhere at any time, without the consent of others. A strange feature that stuck out to me is that there are two cameras, one external facing the direction you are looking and an internal one looking directly in my eye. Apparently the latter detects when you are wearing them and watches for a wink that tells the device to take a picture. I don't care much for a camera staring into my eyeball.

The estimated price once commercialized is projected to be in the $500 range. I personally don't want a pair but can see the desire in this age of high demand for easy technological access. After all, whose neck doesn't hurt from looking down at their smartphone all day?

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"We believe that access to devices that empower people to communicate with images in new ways are truly revolutionary and may enable people to connect in new and potentially better ways."
- Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google