

Apple Vision Pro

Do you know about the all-new headset from Apple? Apple Vision Pro is an augmented reality or 'spatial computing' device. Augmented reality means the user is able to see their surroundings as well as a virtual overlay. It was released in the US on the 2nd of February for £2,849. Its main competitor is the £393 Quest 3 headset from Mark Zuckerberg's Meta, formerly known as Facebook. It was announced at Apple's annual WWDC (Worldwide Developers Conference) in 2023 by the CEO Tim Cook, successor of the late Steve Jobs. It is a complicated device, and Apple has had to work on software, hardware, apps and experiences and the problems that come from wearing a headset in terms of communication.

The software, called visionOS, is navigated without controllers like its competitors. Instead, Apple has developed a new system, which relies on the user's hands, eyes and voice. They can tap their fingers while looking at a button, for example an app icon on the home screen, to select. They can also flick their wrists to scroll on a page. There is a virtual keyboard which can be controlled with the same process or users can connect Apple peripherals, like the Magic Keyboard and Magic Mouse, or even use the dictation feature that they will be familiar with from other Apple devices. The headset's software features a glassy design, which is slightly transparent, and windows lay shadows on your surroundings, or in an 'environment' of famous landmarks that users can select. The main difference from other software, like iOS, is that it is 3D and windows stay wherever you put them.

The hardware is what sets it away from other devices that are similar, and justifies the £2,849 price point. It is powered by the Apple M2 chip, which came with Apple's MacBook's when the device was announced (they have now been replaced by the newer M3 chips that are built with a 3-nanometre architecture). It also features a R1 chip, which specializes in the 3D and 'spatial' aspects of the headset. There is a 4K screen for each eye, which runs at 60 frames per second by default, however it can be automatically upgraded to 90 frames per second. The device features a glass front screen and aluminium sides, which is a familiar material for Apple customers. One of the drawbacks of the headset, however, is the wired battery pack that is marketed for 2.5 hours of use. The battery pack charges with a USB-C cable, within regulations from the European Union, however it has not been released there yet.

On Apple Vision Pro, there are more than 600 apps built by developers who had a test unit sent to them before the official public release in February. It also supports over a million iOS and iPadOS apps, unless a developer has opted out, like Netflix, Spotify and YouTube, which their services are currently only usable through their websites.

Environments is a virtual reality (completely immersive) overlay that blocks out the view of your surroundings. Apps are allowed to make their own environments for use in their apps. Disney+ is a good example of this, as you can be teleported to a special Disney+ Theatre, or the Avengers tower. Disney+ is a pre-installed app that comes with the device, mainly because their apps use the full potential of the headset, and also because the companies work together a lot.

Communication is a hard part to master with a giant headset covering half of your face. Nevertheless, Apple have taken a lot of different approaches to other manufactures with regards to the subject. They have been one of the first companies to allow video calling with a realistic avatar, unlike Meta's more cartoon approach. Users have the option to generate a 'persona' by scanning their face with the cameras on the front of the headset. The cameras can track your facial and hand movements, so FaceTime calls look quite realistic. However, some users have found it quite strange and reminiscent of a retro video game character.

A lot of people like the device and are happy investing £2,849 into it, however lots of other customers are returning the device. It is the first time Apple has released a product like this, and there are a lot more problems still to iron out. It is more for developers to make apps so when it becomes cheaper, it will have a better app base. Eventually this will be the future, and replace smartphones, tablets, laptops and computers forever.

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