Google buys written language translation startup

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Google logo is seen on a wall at the entrance of the Google offices in Brussels on February 5, 2014

Google on Friday confirmed it has bought a startup specializing in using smartphones to translate signs, billboards or other written words in real time.

Quest Visual and the technology built into its Word Lens application will

become part of a Google team devoted to developing translation features and services.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed and Google declined to make any comment on the record.

"With Word Lens, we've seen the beginnings of what's possible when we harness the power of mobile devices to see the world in your language," Quest said in a blog post.

"By joining Google, we can incorporate Quest Visual's technology into Google Translate's broad language coverage and translation capabilities in the future."

Word Lens uses smartphone video cameras to "read" words in one language and translate them into another almost instantly without need for network connections.

Versions of the application have been tailored for smartphones powered by Apple or Android software as well as for Google Glass eyewear that links to the Internet.

The news came as Google this week began letting anyone in the United States buy Glass, priced at $1,500 a pair.

Google has promised lower-priced, fashionably versions of Glass in the not too distant future and has been prepping the market for their arrival.

Fashion industry veteran and jewelry artist Ivy Ross will take charge of Google's Glass efforts beginning Monday, according to the California-based technology titan.

"I look forward to answering the seemingly simple, but truly audacious

questions Glass poses," Ross said in a post at Google+ social network.

"Can technology be something that frees us up and keeps us in the moment, rather than taking us out of it?"

Her resume includes stints at Calvin Klein, Swatch, Coach, Mattel, Bausch & Lomb, Gap and, most recently, Art.com.

The decision to open the "Glass" test, or beta, program on Wednesday to anyone with enough money and curiosity came about a month after a one-day sale of the eyewear to the public.

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