Crowd sourcing project to allow 3D scan-to-print web app

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Technology to allow for printing three dimensional objects is evolving rapidly, making it difficult for some to keep up. It's also still relatively expensive. Currently, people who wish to print such an object have but two choices—buy (or borrow) a 3D printer or contract out with a company that prints 3D objects for a price. Both options require software and a depth camera. Now it appears a third option is about to make its debut—one that might make the entire process both cheaper and far easier to carry out.

Volumental, a company that is currently accepting image data captured via depth camera, printing 3D models and shipping them back, is now looking to create a web based app to replace the software portion of the process. That would mean anyone with a depth camera (which includes Kinect devices) could scan an object, have it rendered onscreen and then sent to a 3D printer of their choice. If successful, a new way to print 3D objects could become as common as printing text and images on a piece of paper. The company has set up a Kickstarter project with a goal of reaching $20,000 to finish writing the web app code—pledges so far are just over half that amount.

As depth cameras (those with two or more lenses) become more common, demand for 3D printing grows, though currently printers able to do so are still quite expensive. If, however, consumers that have already purchased a Kinect device for gaming can use their existing equipment along with what is essentially free software to capture the object data, then half the process of producing 3D models is covered. An added advantage to such a system would be a reduction in difficulty in capturing the 3D image.

Users could conceivable load the browser scanner, spin slowly in place in front of their Kinect device, place an order with Volumental (or have the data sent to another site, such as the local 3D printer at work) and wait for the full color model to arrive at their home. Objects captured would be limited only by the range of the camera—users could conceivably scan every object in their living room, including furniture and have it printed in a size limited only by the ability of the printer to which it is sent. As printer technology improves, so too will the range of materials that can be used as "ink" opening up the door to some pretty amazing possibilities.