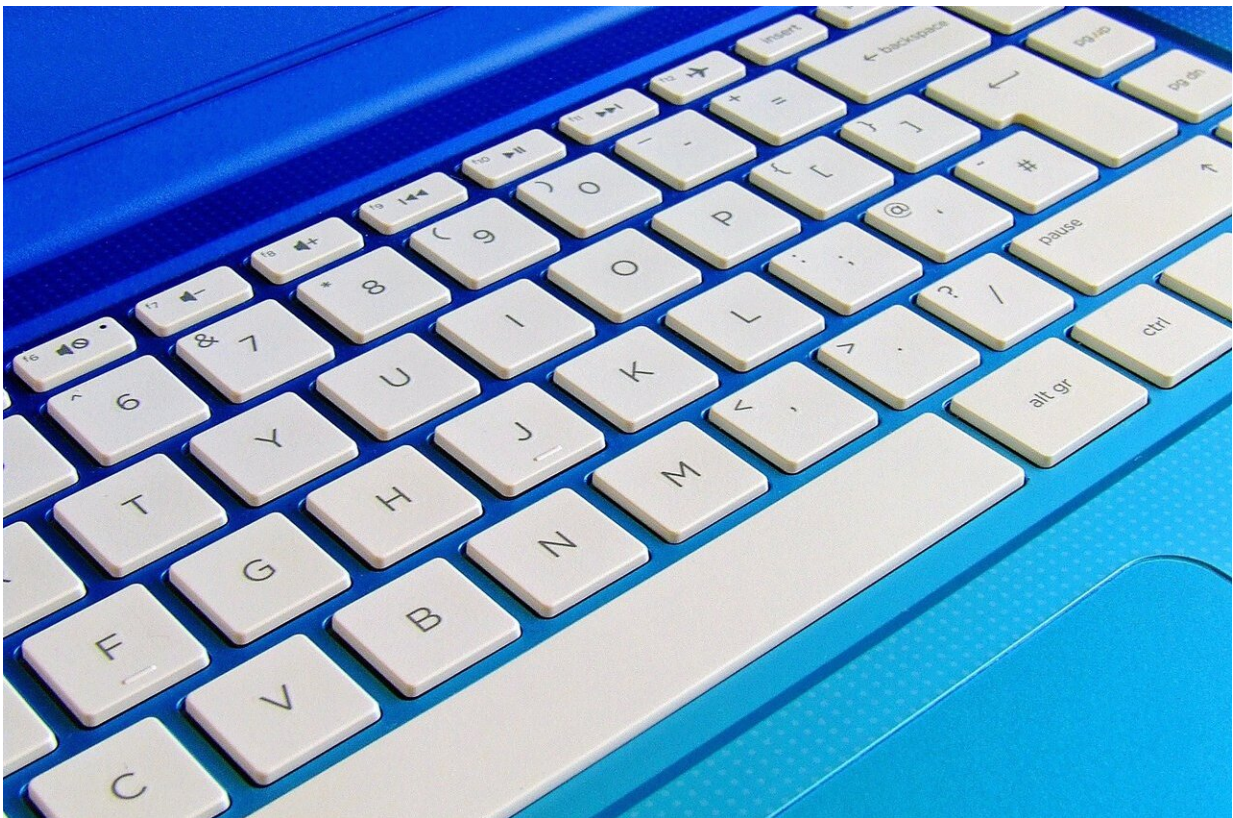


Microsoft's Windows 10 update bets on a bigger virtual-reality role for PC

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Microsoft is trying to nudge laptop and deskbound computers to interact with the three-dimensional world.

The company on Tuesday started rolling out its latest bundle of updates to the Windows 10 operating system with features clustered around a bet that people will use their PCs to experience 3-D virtual worlds.

Dubbed the Fall Creators Update, the package will make its way in waves to the more than 500 million Windows 10 users starting this week. Business users have the ability to delay updates.

"We think 3-D will take off," said Yusuf Mehdi, a corporate vice president who leads marketing for Microsoft's Windows and Devices unit.

The update adds support for a slate of virtual-reality headsets - made by Samsung, HP, Acer and others - designed for use with a PC.

High-end personal computers were already the base for the major virtual-reality headsets released last year, including Oculus Rift and the HTC Vive. Microsoft, based outside Seattle, is aiming to broaden that market by adapting Windows 10 to the newer, sometimes cheaper, devices. The first headsets in that wave became available Tuesday.

"You're going to see new forms of entertainment. What used to be sci-fi is going to become our life," Mehdi said, adding that "it's early across the board" for virtual reality.

Microsoft is also adding the capability to plant and manipulate 3-D objects into its Office suite, opening up the capability to display a profile of a sports car in a PowerPoint presentation and rotate it in three dimensions.

Another feature, the Windows Mixed Reality Viewer, can superimpose a model of a 3-D object into an image from a PC camera, to, say, give the viewer a sense of scale of the car by comparing it to a person in a room.

It's an experience most would recognize from "Pokemon Go," last year's hit mobile game that had millions of people chasing cartoon pocket monsters dropped into the real world.

The new functionality exposes the limits of Microsoft's 3-D push: Most Windows PCs don't include the kind of rear-facing camera required to make the Mixed Reality Viewer app work as intended.

The hardware that does typically pack rear-facing cameras - smartphones and tablets - is almost always powered by Apple's iOS or Google's Android, rather than Windows. Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella, speaking last week at a conference hosted by technology news site GeekWire, said the company simply couldn't compete effectively with its small market share in the global smartphone market.

Instead, Microsoft's aim is to keep supporting a mobile variant of Windows 10 and "push the boundaries of what is a PC," he said.

Microsoft last year wound down the last of its money-losing smartphone unit. But the company is trying to keep its capabilities fresh to invent or react to the next wave of consumer technology. The latest effort: a refreshed take on Microsoft's high-end Surface Book laptop, which comes with a detachable, tablet-like screen.

"Category creation is going to be a big part of what we have to do," Nadella said.

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