

New body scanner offers virtual tape measure for online shopping

Chris Wickham, Reuters

(Reuters) - British researchers have come up with a new body scanning device that gives accurate measurements and could boost online clothes shopping.

Shoppers are still nervous about ordering clothes online because they often do not fit and, some say, there will never be a substitute for trying something on - one reason why the boom in online [retail](#) [1] has not had the same impact on clothing as on music, books and [electronics](#) [2] retailing.

In the United States, for instance, the consultancy ComScore estimated that only 14 percent of online spending went on clothes and [accessories](#) [3] in the year to June.

The new scanner is being developed by the London College of [Fashion](#) [4], video imaging researchers at the University of Surrey and the company Bodymetrics.

The company already has in-store scanners that use the motion sensors from Microsoft Corp's Kinect [gaming](#) [5] device in Bloomingdale's (part of Macy's Inc) in the United States, Selfridges and New Look in Britain, and Karstadt in [Germany](#) [6].

Some firms, including Berlin-based Upcloud, are already offering home scanners that use a webcam, but the British developers say their system is able to measure in unprecedented detail.

Philip Delamore from the London College of [Fashion](#) [4] estimates that 30 to 60 percent of clothes bought online are returned.

"It's common for online shoppers to order two or three different sizes of the same item of clothing at the same time as they're unsure which one will fit best," he said.

With the new system, a shopper inputs his or her height as a reference and can then take a single full-length picture with a webcam or smartphone from which all their other measurements are calculated.

It uses the measurements combined with a person's overall proportions to build a 3D image.

Combining this with sizing information from retailers, the system would also overcome the problem of variable sizing, which can mean a shopper is a "medium" in one store but a "large" in another.

The technology builds on previous work by the University of Surrey that was used to create animated characters in [games](#) [7] like the Sims.

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Adrian Hilton, who is working on the technology at the University, told Reuters that while some shoppers may still enjoy the experience of browsing in stores and trying on clothes, for others an improvement in the reliability of shopping online will be welcome.

"For the male market, I think we're there," he said.

(Editing by David Holmes)

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