Apple’s Visual Intelligence could be a step toward Apple glasses

Apple’s new “Visual Intelligence” feature was one of the most impressive things shown at Monday’s iPhone 16 event. The tool lets users scan the world around them through the iPhone’s camera to identify a dog breed, copy event details off a poster, or look up just about anything around them.

It’s a handy-looking feature that fits right in with the iPhone’s new camera button. But it may also be setting the stage for bigger products down the road: it’s the exact kind of thing Apple will need for future tech like AR glasses.

It’s not hard to imagine how Visual Intelligence could help you out on a device that sees everything you see. Take the idea of learning more about a restaurant, like Apple showed for Visual Intelligence on an iPhone: instead of fishing your phone out of your pocket to look up information about a new spot, with glasses, you could just look at the restaurant, ask a question, and have the glasses tell you more.

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Meta has already proven that computer glasses with an AI assistant can be a good and useful tool for identifying things. It’s not a great leap to imagine Apple doing something similar with a very high level of fit and finish for theoretical glasses. Apple would almost certainly make glasses connect back to all of your apps and personal context on your iPhone, too, which would make Visual Intelligence even more handy.

Of course, Apple already does have a headset covered in cameras: the Vision Pro. But most people don’t walk around with their headset outside of their house, and they probably already know about the things they have at home. It’s long been reported that Apple wants to develop a pair of true AR glasses, and that feels like the ultimate destination for this kind of tech.

The thing is, Apple-made AR glasses might be very far away. *Bloomberg*’s Mark Gurman reported in June that a 2027 launch date has been “bandied about” for its in-development glasses but noted that “no one I’ve spoken to within Apple believes the glasses will be ready in a few years.”

But whenever those glasses arrive, they’re going to need software — and you can see Apple building out the basics of it here. Visual Intelligence might be Apple’s first step toward the killer app for computer spectacles, and by starting now, Apple will potentially have years to refine the feature before it shows up in glasses.

It wouldn’t be unprecedented for Apple to take that approach. The company iterated on AR technologies in the iPhone for years before launching the Vision Pro. Yes, the Vision Pro is arguably much more of a VR headset than an AR device, but it’s clearly a first step toward something that could turn into AR glasses. As Apple improves that hardware, it can work on software features like Visual Intelligence on the iPhone, too, and when the time is right, pack all of the best ideas into a glasses-like product.

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