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## You can now shop on Amazon by taking photos

### App's new "Flow" feature allows for point-and-shoot shopping

By **Quentin Fottrell**

Amazon's (NASDAQ:AMZN) app for iPhone this week added "Flow," an image recognition tool designed to allow consumers to add a product to their shopping cart by merely pointing their phone's camera at it.



#### Amazon app's image recognition

Amazon is integrating product recognition software, called "Flow," into its main shopping app. Point your phone's camera at a labeled product, and if Amazon sells it, you'll see it pop up.

Flow—as its name suggests—aims to make it as seamless as possible to shop. MarketWatch carried out its own "showrooming" with the app. Scanning a three-bottle package of the hair growth serum Rogaine, Flow immediately found the item on Amazon for \$43.85, 30% cheaper than the \$62.99 price in a Duane Reade store. Russell Stover Pecan Delights—a heart-shaped box of chocolates just in time for Valentine's Day—were \$8.99 online, \$1 cheaper than in Duane Reade. "This trend will take some time to grab hold," says retail analyst Jeff Green, "but it's an ingenious idea."

Flow can scan millions of items, according to Amazon, but it won't work with older iOS versions and it's not yet available on Android. The feature will replace "Snap It" as an image recognition search feature on the Amazon iPhone app (iOS7 and above). iOS5 and iOS6 customers will still be able to use Snap It for visual product recognition. "Scan It"—which just scans bar codes—remains unchanged. However, Amazon pitches Flow as something to use at home—rather than as a price-comparison tool in stores. "In some ways, Flow replaces the kitchen white board or chalk board where most families keep their growing list—only this way you don't accidentally forget the shampoo," the spokeswoman says.



Bloomberg

It's clever and fun to use, but it's not entirely foolproof. Pointing the iPhone at a packet of Gillette Mach3 Jetables (\$11.99 in Duane Reade), Flow repeatedly couldn't get a reading on the shiny plastic packaging and eventually gave the following message: "Try pointing your camera at something flat like a book, DVD, videogame or bar code." Flow's first suggestion for a six-pack of Old Spice Fiji deodorant was more expensive online (\$42.77 or \$7.12 each) than in Duane Reade (\$4.99, down from \$6.49). The tool also had more trouble providing an option for bottles of Listerine Ultraclean mouthwash—possibly due to the numerous different sizes and versions—and electric toothbrush replacements, likely due to the small/concealed label.

Retail experts are divided over its usefulness. "This strikes me as the lazy man's shopping robot," says Edgar Dworsky, founder of ConsumerWorld.org. "If you can't even type in the name of the product, give me a break. Most people in a supermarket are not going to take a picture of a Cheerios box, and then leave the store to go to a competitor where it's 20 cents cheaper," he says. And it's not appropriate for big

ticket items like TVs, he adds. It's rather gimmicky, according Rick Singer, CEO of GreatApps.com, but he still regards it as a good tool to compare prices at your local store to those on Amazon. ■

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