

This Is Rover

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Rover. The intrepid explorers at Rocket Code have traveled the ecommerce universe to bring you back the biggest news-teroids and insightful interplanetary insights.

WHAT THE CHATBOT BOOM MEANS FOR ECOMMERCE

As Venture Beat [recently pronounced](#), "The chatbot gold rush is officially here."

The biggest names keep pushing their chips in at the chat bot table, most prominently Facebook and their announcement of several new features in Messenger, including ecommerce-capable chat bots. According to Forbes, a number of businesses [have already started to take advantage of Messenger's chat-bot functionality](#), including Uber and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.

Shopify is also [building commerce bots for Messenger](#), in tandem with its [recent acquisition of startup Kit CRM](#), which lets businesses interact with customers via text message.

Microsoft, meanwhile, is [barreling ahead with chat bot tech](#), [racist bot meltdowns be damned](#).

As Microsoft's experiment showed in gory detail, [the burgeoning bot epoch presents some prickly challenges](#). But chatbot-supported ecommerce is already placing its stamp, with startup ReplyYes [raising \\$2.5M for its SMS-driven purchasing system that's already been used to sell one million vinyl records via text](#). And Shopify's optimism about the space, in particular, is promising for smaller ecommerce retailers who want to take advantage of the era of ["conversational commerce"](#) that's coming quickly into view.

The other side of this coin is the growing importance of the mobile experience in ecommerce. As Craig Miller, Shopify's CMO put it in the company's [press release about the Kit acquisition](#), "We believe messaging apps are the gateway

for the internet on mobile, and conversational commerce represents a huge opportunity for Shopify."

It remains to be seen if chat bots will work for complex ecommerce interactions and sophisticated product catalogs, or if their usefulness is going to be restricted to simpler interactions like hailing an Uber, buying an LP, or tracking an order. Mobile UX paradigms aren't about to change overnight, and live (human) chat probably also still has a place for a while, especially when it comes to tricky customer support resolutions. But the future looks bot-y.

STEP ASIDE, OCULUS—ECOMMERCE VR/AR IS ABOUT TO BLOW UP

Virtual and augmented reality tech for ecommerce has quietly gotten pretty badass. Behind the razzle-dazzle of Facebook-acquired Oculus ([your Rift is shipping... soon! We swear!](#)), a bunch of other companies have been surreptitiously working VR and AR into their commerce paradigms, in pretty cool ways.

Ikea recently announced their [Virtual Reality Kitchen, IKEA VR Experience](#), an app for the HTC Vive that ["brings the user a virtual IKEA kitchen in real world size."](#) Ikea has been on the altered-reality train for (relative) eons, with [an AR app that lets you "place" furniture in your home](#) via your iOS or Android device.

[Amazon, meanwhile, is developing its own virtual reality platform](#). Across the pond, the Amazon of the East, Alibaba, is betting on VR with their [investment in MagicLeap, as well as their very own VR research lab, GnomeMagic Lab](#).

MasterCard is even working on an AR treatment that lets people who who want more out of their PGA tournament experience [buy the rayon shirt off their favorite player's back](#) (not literally).

And the [list](#) just seems to keep [growing](#). One estimate has the combined VR/AR market [worth almost \\$13 billion by 2018](#), so it's little wonder so many big players are jumping into the fray.

Before it becomes a mainstream platform for immersive ecommerce, though, VR presents an even cushier opportunity for plain ol' advertising. As Business Insider points out, [the barrier to entry for advertising in VR is low](#), since "advertisers don't have to change any of the technology behind their ad campaigns" to get them working in virtual headsets.

Want more VR/AR-enhanced ecommerce goodness? Check out [this Shopify piece](#).

BITCOIN'S FUTURE AS AN ECOMMERCE PAYMENT OPTION: HAZY

Oh, Bitcoin. Are you dead? Alive and thriving? Merely misunderstood?

The state of affairs for Bitcoin doesn't translate into easy answers, especially for the lay reader—us included. Let's just say for now the future of the 'coin looks... murky.

As Tim Draper, a venture capitalist and Bitcoin follower, [told Bloomberg at the end of last year](#), 2016 "[s]hould be a revealing year for Bitcoin." That sure clears things up.

Standing up for the pessimists, earlier this year, Mike Hearn, a longtime Bitcoin developer and enthusiast, [blasted the "Bitcoin experiment" as a "failure" in a post on Medium](#).

The fact that [a small number of Bitcoin miners in China supposedly control upward of 80% of Bitcoin production](#) appears to be [a major factor](#) in the [hand-wringing](#) over the state and fate of the cryptocurrency. And it's admittedly hard to find unbridled optimism about Bitcoin from sources that don't sound like they have a lot vested in the tech. (Take [this article](#), or [this one](#).)

But here comes ecommerce monolith Alibaba again, with a [cloud payment platform based on the Bitcoin blockchain](#), one that can be used to process and settle cheap payments for existing users of their [Alipay Wallet](#) system.

And there are other faintly bright signs for Bitcoin, in general *and* for ecommerce applications. [Shopify merchants have been able to accept Bitcoin for more than two years now](#). Bitcoin could offer [advantages over credit cards](#), especially for [cross-border transactions](#). And [marketplaces like Purse.io, Openbazaar, and DarkZone](#) are offering interesting Bitcoin-based alternatives to shopping at the big dogs with your fiat money.

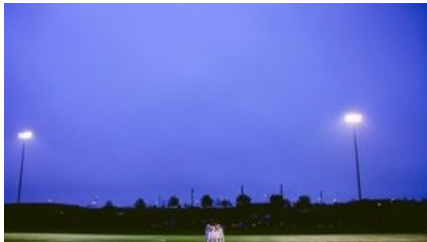
If Bitcoin + ecommerce = a match made in heaven, does that mean Bitcoin is dead? Its future looks at least a little [rocky](#). But maybe it [just needs time](#).

METEORITES: QUICK HITS FROM AROUND THE COSMOS

- [Is the "Tinderization" of ecommerce a good thing?](#)
- [Shopify merchants can now offer same-day delivery via Postmates.](#)
- [Is Amazon capping competitors' growth prospects?](#)
- [A roundup of 99 beautiful ecommerce website designs.](#)
- [Need a little ecommerce design and tech inspiration?](#)
- [Here's a nifty curated directory of resources and tools to help you manage your software products.](#)
- [The key to an effective customer loyalty strategy is data.](#)
- [Ecommerce is booming in Taiwan.](#)

MORE INTERPLANETARY DEEP THOUGHTS

Here's what we've been cooking up lately over on [Thinkship](#).



[From the Ground Up](#)

People, process, and building a content operation that grows with you.



[From Dining to Digital, Hospitality Is Hospitality](#)

What agencies can learn from the restaurant world about creating stellar client experiences



[How to Concoct a Bloody Good Ecommerce Experience](#)

Your ecommerce site is probably less engaging than a horror movie. Let's fix that.