Three quarters of the IKEA catalogue is CGI

Author: James Vincent - The Independent
Date: 1st September 2014

Detailed 3D models of products are dropped into virtual rooms, saving time and money on shipping products round the world for photo-shoots

If the sleek and minimalist kitchens and sitting rooms featured in Ikea's promotional images look a little too perfect to be true, well, that's because they are.

A new article from digital arts site CG Society has revealed that the Swedish furniture company uses 3D computer models to create as many as three quarters of the images in its catalogues.

This allows them to get perfect product shots in any combination they like, with detailed 3D models of everything from kettles to coffee tables dropped into virtual rooms and adjusted for light and shadow until they look perfect.

"From both an environmental and time point of view, we don't want to have to ship in all those white-goods from everywhere, shoot them and then ship them all back again," Ikea IT manager Martin Enthed told CG Society.

"Because of the development of things like ray-tracers, a photographers' knowledge of light is now directly transferrable to 3D - they can put lights wherever they want - exactly what they do in a real studio."

Real or fake? The smooth, shiny surfaces of the kitchen are the easiest to mock up in CGI - and the most-timing consuming to arrange in real life.

The company's first computer generated product appeared in the autumn catalogue from 2006 (a wooden chair named "Bertil") and by 2012 it was reported that a quarter of their products were styled in a computer.

Although the team originally only planned to use 3D modelling for individual product shots, they eventually moved to mocking up entire rooms, selecting fixtures and fittings from a database of more than 25,000 products - each created by scanning the physical thing itself and mapping it at a 1:1 scale.

Although this may sound extreme, the practice is apparently extremely widespread, with computers used to create the majority of images used in product catalogues according to Richard Benson, creative director at digital imagery studio Pikcells.

Speaking to design site Dezeen last year, Benson, said: "Most kitchen, bedroom and bathroom companies now use CGI to create their marketing material and no one has realised."

"The technology can now make these wonderfully realistic images as good as photography, and in some cases better."

Benson noted that although there were still some materials that were hard to recreate digitally (flowers are still a real problem) even soft furnishings and fabrics were beginning to fall into the digital camp and had become "extremely realistic" in recent years.

Link: http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/three-quarters-of-the-ikea-catalogue-is-cgi-9704120.html