Augmented Reality… Too Much Technology?

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Is this next bit of technology worth exploiting in engineering? There are certainly applications to visualize a specific part within its associated surroundings or to simulate placing a part, making sure everything fits. There are certainly applications, but how practical, useful, or needed it is will remain to be seen.

At the recent Dassault Systèmes [1] event, announcing their newest version of SolidWorks, the organizers made a different announcement that made a room of engineering and technology journalists gasp. Without revealing too much information, they brought out an iPad, continuing to chat about ISketch (their forthcoming iPad based application) the speaker dropped a piece of paper on the table.

With gasps of awe and mumblings, the room was presented with an augmented reality platform. I'm guilty of having the same reaction as the rest of my peers. Dassault Systèmes [1] demonstrated the beginning beta of this technology and described the potential for designing CAD within an augmented reality environment. He walked around the superimposed model, demonstrating the real-space nature of the technology, and even demonstrated a cross-section function by twisting and shifting the iPad.

This is a profoundly cool-looking step to a new method of CAD, but is it practical? I'm not one to naysay new advances – in fact, I have a tendency to be a first adopter, even though I pretend to be skeptical. The concept of using an iPad to manipulate and cut-away a design while seeing it within the exact environment that it will be used is quite impressive, but it treads the fine line of becoming a gimmick.

While this new system would give company managers an excuse to include iPads into their budget, I stumble on the practicality of such technology. Now, Dassault [1] didn't present a whole lot of information on where they were going with this, and I'm sure other companies are approaching similar concepts, so my skepticism may be due to a lack of CAD imagination.

CAD users often utilize both 2D and 3D software to create and manipulate designs in various dimensions – could they find a new way to utilize augmented reality? In the same sense, those using 3D design sometimes revert back to 2D layouts because, sometimes, it is just easier. It seems augmented reality could be another step in this ladder. The impending question about redundancy still looms as we wait for this next big thing.

It goes without saying that augmented reality is here to stay (especially in areas like gaming and advertising), but is this next bit of technology worth exploiting in engineering? There are certainly applications to visualize a specific part within its

associated surroundings or to simulate placing a part, making sure everything fits. There are certainly applications, but how practical, useful, or needed it is will remain to be seen.

What are your thoughts on the progress of augmented reality in the CAD world? Email chris.fox@advantagemedia.com *[2].*

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