
Beam me to my on-air interview

By Tim Doyle

STATS LLC, a Northbrook, IL - based sports data company, wants to transform how the remote TV interview is conducted.

At the National Association of Broadcasters show in Las Vegas, STATS and Vizrt Ltd. showed off hologram technology to masses of attendees. The technology allows a remote interview subject to appear next to a studio anchor.

The technology was also famously displayed on election night in 2008 to 13 million CNN viewers, as Wolf Blitzer and Anderson Cooper interviewed correspondent Jessica Yellin and musician will.i.am, respectively.

In December 2008, STATS bought SportVU, an Israeli company that developed technology that optically tracks soccer players 16 times a second to glean data on a player's movement and speed. The optical tracking technology uses existing sports stadium cameras to create a panoramic video feed of the action. That video is then run through an algorithm to gather the data.

At CNN's urging, SportVU used that technology as a basis to develop video hologram images, Nicole DeFord, a strategic planning analyst for STATS, told SNL Kagan in an interview at the company's booth at NAB.

“It redefines what a remote interview is,” DeFord said.

“It makes distance less of a problem.”

To illustrate the technology, DeFord stood before 25 small cameras with a green screen behind her to create a 180-degree video feed. An anchor at Vizrt's nearby booth and DeFord then appeared side by side on screen.

On TV, DeFord's image was clearer than the CNN guests on election night — those feeds summoned memories of Princess Leia's hologram rendering in "Star Wars."

DeFord said the cable news network intentionally made the hologram video fuzzy, because they feared viewers would think the guests were teleported into the studio.

With that episode behind them, STATS seemed quite happy to be generating significant buzz about the technology at the show.

"We've had a great response to it," DeFord said.