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Microsoft ESP: Virtual reality made cheaper

By SINDYA BHANOO, The Industry Standard,

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PRINT

Microsoft has launched version 2.0 of ESP, a virtual reality platform that aims to revolutionize the way many sectors train workers or plan and test products by allowing companies to build in-house simulation tools for far cheaper than possible before.

Currently, ESP is mostly used to simulate flight, particularly for military training.

Microsoft ESP solutions include a Northrop Grumman simulator that demonstrates the virtual landing of an F-18 Hornet, a cockpit trainer for a F-16 and the simulation of a helicopter landing on a moving ship.

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But Microsoft wants ESP to grow beyond basic military applications. By making the tool user-friendly and cost-effective, they believe everyone from real estate companies to oil companies to city planners and law enforcement can make use of simulations.

The cost of an ESP license is a fraction of what boutique studios charge to make custom training simulations for companies. Training simulations of that sort can cost US$500,000 and up, according to BusinessWeek.

Microsoft will soon release simulation platforms for trains, automobiles and underwater movement, according to James Governor, an industry analyst at RedMonk.

After establishing "a simulation of everything," Governor added, Microsoft can integrate its simulations with other platforms, such as Virtual Earth.

It could, in the long run, turn into a remarkably realistic simulator for the entire world, accurate down to the location of details such as roads, waterfalls and even individual trees.

How will they do this? In part, by utilizing user generated content -- input from the masses can help create a extraordinarily accurate system, Governor wrote.

"If Microsoft gets the tooling right, can establish the right programming languages and standards, makes the world hackable, doesn't end up in a digital rights management rat-hole, and provides the right tools it could revolutionize a number of

industries," Governor wrote.

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