

Anchorman for video conferences

Video conferences between locations even several thousand miles apart and in different languages could soon become more natural and easier thanks to a polyglot on wheels developed by T-Systems.



The showstopper highlight is that Double is connected to a real time translation module. When Vaniukov speaks into his headset, saying something to his colleagues in Bonn along the lines of “Привет, Майкл, как дела?”, he sees and hears “Hello Michael, how are you?” on his screen. Overall, Double makes the meeting not only more comprehensible, but less complicated. Aside from Russian, English, and German, Double’s real time translation also offers Japanese, Chinese, and other languages, such as Hindi. For now, the services are based on Microsoft technology, “but we have designed the solution in such a way that other translation software developers can also get in on the action,” said Vaniukov.

The invention is slated to hit the market later this year. In addition to Double, users only need a browser and a webcam to use it with a tablet or a PC. “We think the solution provides a good service for any industry and is particularly exciting for widespread companies. It makes you much more present in meetings,” said Timo Taschewski, product manager for T-Systems in Germany. Naturally, the developers have also given consideration to maximum security: “Double can never start by itself and, say, wander around offices taking pictures, you always have to actively take a call for it to start working,” said Taschewski.

While the first intended use of the robot Double and its extended software for translation is clearly defined, Taschewski is already thinking about entirely new scenarios: “Double as a tour guide that can travel set routes in a museum and explain the works to visitors in their native language – the possibilities are limitless.” The virtual and physical worlds are indeed mixing more and more, and now with real time communication.

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Hollywood blockbusters in 3D have long become standard, virtual and augmented reality solutions are taking root in factories, and visualized servers are replacing a plethora of real hardware: The virtual world is mixing more and more with the physical world. Now, Russian tinkerers at T-Systems have come up with another innovation for this blending of worlds.

“Our goal is to overcome language barriers and distances,” said Kirill Vaniukov, Technical Project Manager at T-Systems in Saint-Petersburg. To do this, Vaniukov and his colleagues combined a telepresence robot by U.S. startup Double Robotics with real time translation software. The idea: Double – which is reminiscent of a Segway – can be controlled remotely at Deutsche Telekom headquarters by an attendee of a video conference between, say, Moscow and Bonn. The robot itself is located in a conference room in Russia, where those in attendance see the virtual counterpart in Bonn on the robot’s iPad, almost as if they were meeting face-to-face. Kind of like an anchorman of the video conference, Double can move during communication to “look” at each attendee, making them more tangible. “A rolling, digital alter-ego,” marveled “Der Spiegel” magazine in a recent article.

 Kirill.Vaniukov@t-systems.com
 www.doublerobotics.com