

27 March 2006

SeeReal Shows 2D/3D Panel

One of our first appointments at CeBIT this year was with 3D display specialist SeeReal. The company was in hall 25 and was mainly showing the latest versions of its 3D only monitors. These are still very specialist in terms of application and are priced accordingly at €3,500. Most buyers use the 3D screen in conjunction with a conventional display and the company says that this has become more practical as dual head graphics cards are now more widely available.

SeeReal wants 3D monitors to become more widely used and it knows that the price must drop dramatically for this to happen. It is ambitious and is certain that 3D will be commonly used in two to three years time.

The news for CeBIT was a demonstration of a mixed 2D and 3D panel. The technology uses the refresh rate of the panel to achieve high resolution and the mix of 2D and 3D and for this reason the early demonstrator that we saw is limited by the current generation of LCD panels. These refresh at up to 70Hz but SeeReal says it needs 120Hz or more to get good results. It has an interest in the Samsung colour filter-less panel as this has very high refresh rates.

The demo was very good despite the limitations of the panel. At the moment the cabinet housing the new panel and backlighting combination is rather bulky although it's not as deep as a CRT. The company expects to show a significant improvement on this at SID. The company is using a head tracking system in conjunction with its proprietary optics and backlight system to maintain high resolution. The system does not need shutter glasses and the fact that there's no parallax barrier means the panel's native resolution is retained.

It is possible to set up a multi-user system too although this was not demonstrated to us. There are some issues to be resolved in terms of the efficiency of the backlight system as well.

We've often been sceptical of any company that says it can make 3D displays for long term use for the average user. The best systems usually use shutter glasses and are hugely expensive. The cheaper systems are always of dubious quality and typically are uncomfortable to view for more than a few minutes at a time. If SeeReal can get the panel makers to provide the technology it needs, the mix of 2D and 3D plus high resolution could well be compelling for some applications. And if it can hit its target of just a few tens of dollars of additional cost, that will really open up the market.