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Another Dimension in Technology Awaits

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Starting next month, a Home 3-D Experience Lab at USC will explore the promise of new innovations for the consumer.

By Ariel Carpenter

If you've been to the movies lately, chances are your popcorn came with a pair of 3-D glasses.

U2 3-D, *Bolt*, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and *Under the Sea 3-D* are among the slate of recent theatrical entries taking audiences into another dimension.

Now, with affordable 3-D-enabled consumer electronics products on the market and 3-D programming cropping up on television sets, will 3-D technology become a mainstay in the living room?

That's what the Entertainment Technology Center @ USC hopes to explore with the launch of a new Home 3-D Experience Lab in mid-March.

"We're acting as 'Switzerland' for the many constituents who have a stake in making 3-D work in the consumer market. We believe 10 years from now, high-quality 3-D movies in the home will be commonplace," said David Wertheimer, executive director of the center. "A significant proportion of televisions – maybe even the majority – will come 'off the shelf' as 3-D capable."

The entertainment and consumer electronics industry-funded lab will encourage collaboration between professional and research communities to develop technical standards and industry best practices for the use of 3-D technology. With the Entertainment Technology Center's help, Hollywood will take steps to unleash the power of 3-D as an immersive entertainment experience and transform the technology from theatrical gimmick to consumer goldmine.

Displaying an evolving showcase of state-of-the-art products and services targeted to the consumer 3-D entertainment market, the lab's 3-D products currently range from a \$6,500 46-inch 3-D-enabled Hyundai screen to a \$90 Webcam by Minoru that comes with 3-D glasses.

"3-D brings something new to the home viewing experience," said Chuck Dages, executive vice president of emerging technology for the Warner Home Entertainment Group, an Entertainment Technology Center sponsor. "There's a consensus that there's a lot of activity around 3-D technology innovation, and we are trying to find out how it fits in today."

Dages said he expects USC's role will be to help industry players understand how to standardize 3-D technology for the home by tapping the expertise of students, technologists and "storytellers" on campus.

According to the Entertainment Technology Center's Phil Lelyveld, the center's 3-D lab also will help USC faculty study issues related to 3-D entertainment and evangelize the possibilities of 3-D technology across campus.

"3-D is hot," Lelyveld said. "And we are trying to create a bridge between industry and university to help drive the market forward."

Wertheimer said USC students will be invaluable to the process. Students from fine arts,



David Wertheimer, executive director of the Entertainment Technology Center @ USC



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engineering, cinema and business already are participating in forums with entertainment executives to discuss their experiences with 3-D technology.

In addition, the USC School of Cinematic Arts is investigating a curriculum built around 3-D technology at the undergraduate level, said USC professor Michael Peyser, a veteran film producer of 3-D content. "There's a perfect opportunity here," he said, "particularly around how to use 3-D for creative storytelling and narrative filmmaking."

Wertheimer added, "The technology of 3-D, especially in the theatre, has reached the point where just about anything is possible; it's now critical for students and faculty to focus on teaching the 'art' of 3-D to the next generation of filmmakers."

So whether a decade from now, consumers will still need to don goggles to catch their favorite show in 3-D remains to be seen. One thing is certain: Unlike the glasses at the theatre, they won't have to return them when the show ends.