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Virtual reality

Logistical problems with multiple minesites and international experts may be solved with a technology platform that allows companies to view a 3D visualisation of minesites. **By Alison Middleton**

A specialist software company has turned virtual space into a resources reality with a solution which could help the mining industry's labour shortage and training issues.

Sentient, based in Perth, Western Australia, allows mining companies to view their sites, infrastructure and other data and information in real-time from anywhere in the world.

Companies including Woodside, Fortescue Metals Group, Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton are already using Sentient's technology for inductions and safe work practices.

And the firm believes the technology could help to manage an increasing demand for workers.

Images, video and audio are all incorporated into the virtual space, creating an environment which is as close to the real thing as possible without being on the actual site.

It enables people heading to a new site to be completely familiar with their surroundings before they even arrive. And experts thousands of miles away can advise colleagues onsite by slipping into the 3D platform through a web browser or by using

their smartphone.

Sentient director Doug Bester said while systems such as MVX could not replace people, it did allow companies to make better use of existing staff.

"MVX is a very powerful system that brings data into 3D true to life scenes," he said.

"The ease and comfort of use, thanks to its 3D nature, makes it faster to use than older systems.

"We are doing a lot of development into using existing 3D CAD assets to display data from other sources into MVX, which brings everything into one central system.



Screened: you can view the entire operation from the comfort of your office.



press clip

“The technology allows our mining clients to view a site or piece of infrastructure in 3D real-time, so that they can create a ‘virtual’ project which can be operated using the technology.

“It also enables companies to save valuable human resources on estimating projects through this platform and eliminates the need to travel to site.

“Rather, engineers can meet in a ‘virtual’ space. Similarly, it works well for the baby boomer workforce who hold all the technical information but would rather be in the office than onsite.”

Bester said the recent leaps in mobile phone technology were of great use to businesses with remote operations, meaning real-life visual information was transferred instantly.

“These technologies work to bring information to people, rather than people having to work to find it themselves,” he said.

“They make better use of people’s time. When labour resources are critical, every extra minute counts.

“When labour shortages bite, the competition for skilled people is high and therefore it is hard to retain staff and this

constant hiring requires an agile approach to training.

“MVX gives a virtual introduction to a site so a new employee can experience the operation before they even set foot on the real thing. It is a very strong training tool for many of our clients.”

Bester said Sentient was fortunate to have made good use of a technology that enabled skills to be utilised more effectively.

“It is a very flexible system, meaning we really can make it whatever a client needs it to be,” he added.



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Mining firms are using 3D to view remote sites.