Interactive Conferencing: New Beta Product ConnectR By iRobot

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The iRobot ConnectR. Credit:iRobot

The iRobot Corporation has expanded its technology to interactive robotic conferencing. The device is currently offered at a reduced cost for candidates in the pilot project. The testers are required to submit surveys of their experiences.

The iRobot Corporation has a new product in beta phase called the ConnectR. It is a "virtual presence network, (VPN) " The device will allow users to access the iRobot´s secure network that allows video and audio calls between the ConnectR software and the robot. The company is recruiting candidates for a pilot project. This allows registrants to purchase the ConnectR for $199. The expected retail price when it is released will probably be in the $500 range. For users enrolled in the low

introductory pilot project, iRobot expects as a condition of purchase some operational surveys be completed.

The way the ConnectR works is by virtue of a built-in microphone and speaker for two way communication. The robot has two built- in cameras which effect the appearance of a single video source. The technology allows the user to zoom, go wide angle and provide close up viewing. The zoom level is nearly 17x and the camera has 220 degrees of tilt and can be panned 360 degrees using the wheels of the device. The ConnectR provides users with a unique password and secure back-end network that provides privacy of communications.

The set-up requires a wireless network and broadband connection. The following salient points should be made in the overall description of the product, but it is made clear in the FAQ section. In addition the user must have a computer that is equipped with Pentium 111 or better. The computer must have Windows XP with the service pack. There must be at least 256MB of RAM available and 30MB Hard Drive space. The computer needs a sound card and video card with 4MB of memory. Also, the user needs Microsoft Direct 9.0c.

The ConnectR comes with everything else you need to enjoy this flexible and fun interactive video conferencing device in the box. The ConnectR has a rechargeable battery, self charging base, joystick, headset microphone, remote control and software that is downloaded from the Internet. The ConnectR robot can run at night and comes equipped with a small headlight.

The ConnectR is expected to be marketed to families with distant relatives for keeping up with familial events. Some other purposes include small business interactive communications and creative enterprises where seeing the work in progress is essential. Each user is given a ConnectR phone number and private pin number.

The ConnectR is expected to be some months away from going retail, but it can be viewed at 2008 CES in Las Vegas from January 7-10. The 2008 International Consumer Electronics awarded iRobot Best in Innovation and Design for its gutter cleaning device for home appliances.