

360-degree cameras to deepen online Oscar ogling

February 24 2011, By RYAN NAKASHIMA , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Celebrity watchers won't need to dress up to feel like they're at the Oscars this year.

For \$5, they'll be able to gaze around at whomever they wish, focus in on a dress or a bowtie and watch A-listers brush past them up the steps to the Kodak Theatre - all on the Internet.

And for the first time, viewers will be able to peek at an exclusive after-party called the Governors Ball and watch winners have their name plates engraved and attached to their statuettes.

Half a dozen 360-degree cameras have been set up for the task. Inside each are 11 separate cameras feeding a constant stream of video online.

Viewers can look in any direction with the control of a mouse as the streams are blended together in one seamless video. That means you can glance down at someone's shoes or stare up at the sky. (Unfortunately, rain is again in the forecast.)

Accompanied by about two dozen other fixed-position cameras around the venue, the setup marks the largest online push for the Oscars ever. Imagine about 30 flies on the wall and the chance to flit between them and listen in.

Much of the impetus came from two-time Academy Award-winner John Lasseter, chief creative officer of [Walt Disney](#) and Pixar Animation

Studios and a member of the Academy's board. Pixar's short movie "Day & Night" and the animated feature "Toy Story 3" are up for awards Sunday.

The home viewer only gets to see a fraction of what goes on at the Oscars, and this was an opportunity to impart the experience of someone attending, Lasseter said.

And no show would be complete without a view of the screaming, jostling paparazzi angling for a shot.

"It is so funny and so insane," Lasseter said in an interview.

Because home viewers will be able to linger on the red carpet longer than the stars, "it's going to give the viewer at home more access to the [Oscar](#) ceremony than even people going to the Oscars," he said.

Coverage extends before, during and after the show.

Viewers who do not want to pay \$5 will get some features free on the Oscars website for ABC, which has televised the awards show every year since 1976. They include some of the fixed-position cameras on the red carpet and the popular backstage thank-you cam.

Available only for a fee are the 360-degree cameras and access to the Governors Ball.

Also part of the paid access are backstage cameras in a new array of positions, including one that lifts the curtain on what the superstar audience does during commercial breaks. A map of the scene plus camera positions will help users decide where to home in.

Albert Cheng, executive vice president of digital media for the

Disney/ABC Television Group, said viewers will get unprecedented access to the ball and other areas that aren't televised on ABC.

"People never used to get to see the stars eat and party," he said. "This is using technology to tell stories. It's going beyond what everybody else has done."

The 360-degree technology comes from BigLook360 LLC, a Dallas-based company that deployed just such a camera to capture the implosion of the Cowboys' old home, the Texas Stadium, last April - from the inside.

The company also deployed one of their cameras at the Emmys, Golden Globes and Grammys for People magazine's website. The Oscars mark the first time multiple cameras will be deployed for live streaming all at once.

"It's like standing next to someone," said BigLook360's CEO and founder, Lance Loesberg. "You're right there."

The initiative is a test of people's willingness to pay for such streams.

The Oscars, with 41 million viewers last year, is usually the second-most watched telecast of the year after the Super Bowl. Commercials during the ABC broadcast are going for an average of \$1.7 million per 30 seconds of commercial air time.

Online advertising and the new \$5 fees could add to that, although no executives gave a prediction for how many people would sign up. Some have already bought in.

"I don't think any of us are projecting enormous revenues this year," said Ric Robertson, executive administrator for the Academy. "I hope first

and foremost it's a satisfying experience. If it's a satisfying experience in Year One, then in Year Two I think it'll sell itself."

The online move is a joint venture between ABC parent The Walt Disney Co., and the non-profit Academy. They will share costs and split the receipts.

A lower-priced \$1 offering is also available for Apple Inc.'s iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch, although those users won't be able to use the 360-degree cameras because those feeds use Adobe Systems Inc.'s Flash software, which Apple devices do not support.

More information:

A video demo of Oscar Backstage Pass: <http://bit.ly/ejeXeh>

A demo of BigLook360's video of the implosion of Texas Stadium:

<http://bit.ly/fztel0>

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