

Holograms on the horizon? Company seeks to make futuristic technology mainstream

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Remember R2D2 beaming a hologram of Princess Leia pleading for help from Obi-Wan-Kenobi in the first Star Wars movie back in 1977?

Now a San Diego company aims to bring similar holograms to real life on desktop and handheld devices.

IKIN, founded four years ago by Taylor Scott Griffith and Joe Ward, is working on volumetric hardware, "neural adaptive" artificial intelligence algorithms and other software to deliver holograms on small devices—including an accessory that attaches to smartphones.

IKIN's products aren't ready for [prime time](#) yet. They remain in the beta testing or special order phase. When they do launch commercially, they'll face stiff competition from more established technologies, such as augmented reality smart glasses and virtual reality headsets.

"When I look at holographics, I don't know that there is a huge market today or in the next couple of years," said Eric Abbruzzese, research director at ABI Research, which tracks the industry. "But I am excited to see the miniaturization of the technology. I think we're seeing the first of that with an IKIN."

If IKIN succeeds in delivering easy-to-use holograms without headgear, it could find audiences across a wide range of industries. They include [video conferencing](#)—with life-like Zoom calls and more engaging online education—e-commerce, healthcare, real estate, architecture, remote field repair and gaming.

Griffith, IKIN's chief technology officer, contends that holograms deliver a more intense emotional experience. He saw that first-hand while working on holographic shows in Las Vegas, which he declined to name. But holograms are used in some stage productions to bring back deceased performers such as Tupac Shakur, Whitney Houston and Michael Jackson.

"You would have people weeping, especially when it came to the holographic resurrections," he said. "It is really an incredibly powerful thing."

"I was working to create this optics system," he continued. "It is easy to create large-scale systems but incredibly difficult to create a functional small-scale system when it comes to holograms. I finally stumbled upon a solution."

The young company's technology has popped onto the radar of a U.S. military contractor, which included it as part of a 5G logistics demonstration at a military warehouse in Georgia.

It's also being explored by an undisclosed cosmetics firm, which is looking to use it for remote product testing.

IKIN has two main projects under development. The ARC is a 32-inch desktop display that projects holograms in ambient light and is directed at businesses. At the company's San Diego headquarters, ARC produced a [hologram](#) of an eyeball, which spun so it could be examined from various angles.

"It's really cool to be able scan a [turbine engine](#) and see it in a hologram for cracks and defects over time," said Ward, IKIN's chief executive. "The goal is to continue to explore business-to-business opportunities while at the same time producing a consumer product."

IKIN's second project is an accessory display that attaches to smartphones to enable holographic images on handsets.

Estimated to cost under \$500, the RYZ display is expected to launch sometime next year. It includes a software kit that can be uploaded into the Unity 3D development platform.

Unity is a popular game engine used by [software developers](#) across desktop, mobile, console and virtual reality platforms.

The RYZ kit allows developers to repurpose existing content and apps to enable holograms, as well as create new holographic content. "Literally right now all the applications that exist on a phone are ready to be translated into a holographic environment," said Griffith.

The roughly 20-employee company has raised about \$15 million in seed money since it was founded. It is now seeking to raise an additional \$20.9 million, according to filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Abbruzzese, the ABI Research analyst, said IKIN's challenge will be getting content creators on board and making its technology easy to use. It is still "early days," he said.

"I hesitate to make the comparison to 3D TVs, but I think it is apt," said Abbruzzese. "Even if the content is there, the interest might not be. There have been attempts at glasses-free 3D—holographics being sort of the next step for 3D—and it never really caught on."

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