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ATLAS Virtual Visits: Bringing the World into the ATLAS Control Room

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The newfound ability of Social Media to transform public communication back to a conversational nature provides HEP with a powerful tool for Outreach and Communication. By far, the most effective component of nearly any visit or public event is that fact that the students, teachers, media, and members of the public have a chance to meet and converse with real scientists.

While more than 30,000 visitors passed through the ATLAS Visitor Centre in 2011, nearly 7 billion did not have a chance to make the trip. Clearly this is not for lack of interest. Rather, the costs of travel, in terms of time and money, and limited parking, put that number somewhat out of reach. On the other hand, during the LHC “First Physics” event of 2010, more than 2 million visitors joined the experiment control rooms via webcast for the celebration.

I present a project developed for the ATLAS Experiment’s Outreach and Education program that complements the webcast infrastructure with video conferencing and wireless sound systems, allowing the public to interact with hosts in the control room with minimal disturbance to the shifters. These “Virtual Visits” have included high school classes, LHC Masterclasses, conferences, expositions and other events in Europe, USA, Japan and Australia, to name a few. I will discuss the technology used, potential pitfalls (and ways to avoid them), and our plans for the future.

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