

360 Sonar – How New Technology Has Changed the Game

By Bernard Williams, Outdoor Writer, Magnolia Crappie Club

Turning on the 360 sonar and watching it light up reminds me somewhat of a video game. 360 sonar is the latest and greatest in sport fishing sonar. What we're seeing in 360 sonar was once only available to military and top-end commercial applications. For anyone unfamiliar with this technology, it creates a picture of what's ahead and around your boat.

A few years ago we were raving about side-scan and down-scan and what it could do. Never before could we see the lake floor in such clarity. All that has changed and a number of companies are offering units that are "All-Seeing". Lowrance offers the SpotlightScan, Simrad has Forward Scan, and Garmin has the Panoptix.

My experience is with the transom mounted "Down-Looking" transducer. I chose this unit because it mainly fish from the back of my boat, although sometimes I wish I had the forward-looking transducer mounted to my trolling motor.

Each of the unit uses ceramic elements for transmitting and receiving. Garmin uses nearly 100 of these elements, far more than the 8 to 15 elements used in the other transducers. The more elements used the clearer and more precise the picture becomes.

The Garmin Panoptix - The Garmin unit offers 3 different views for the Forward and 3 different views Down Transducers.

- LiveVü Forward - Provides a more live-video look that shows fish swimming and moving toward or away from the boat. See your lure. See fish react to your lure. See and feel the strike.
- RealVü 3D Forward - Scans the area in front of your boat, creating a forward-looking 3D view of the bottom, structure, and fish. You can control how quickly the forward area is scanned to provide greater or less detail, making it very easy to identify where the fish really are.
- FrontVü - To help give you time to avoid collisions with submerged obstacles, FrontVü provides a look forward that shows underwater obstructions within a 300-foot range as you approach them in real time.
- LiveVü Down - Provides real-time moving sonar images below the boat. With LiveVü Down, see small baitfish and large target fish swimming around and pinpoint their distance left or right, and their depth.
- RealVü 3D Historical - Gives you a wealth of sonar data. It scrolls through the data as the boat moves to show the history of entire water columns – from the bottom to the surface and all of the fish in between. Bottom contours and fish pop in vivid color in three dimensions.
- RealVü 3D Down - Digitally scans the area below the boat from front to back and side to side. A full 3D view of the area under the boat is constructed, showing bottom contour changes, fish, and structure, even while stationary.

My absolute favorite is the RealVü 3D Historical. It shows me what I've passed over thus giving me the option of turning around on the fish. I can see bottom contours, stumps, logs and humps that I couldn't distinguish with side or down view. Plus I can stretch out the range and see nearly 40 feet on each side in 25 feet of water or deeper.

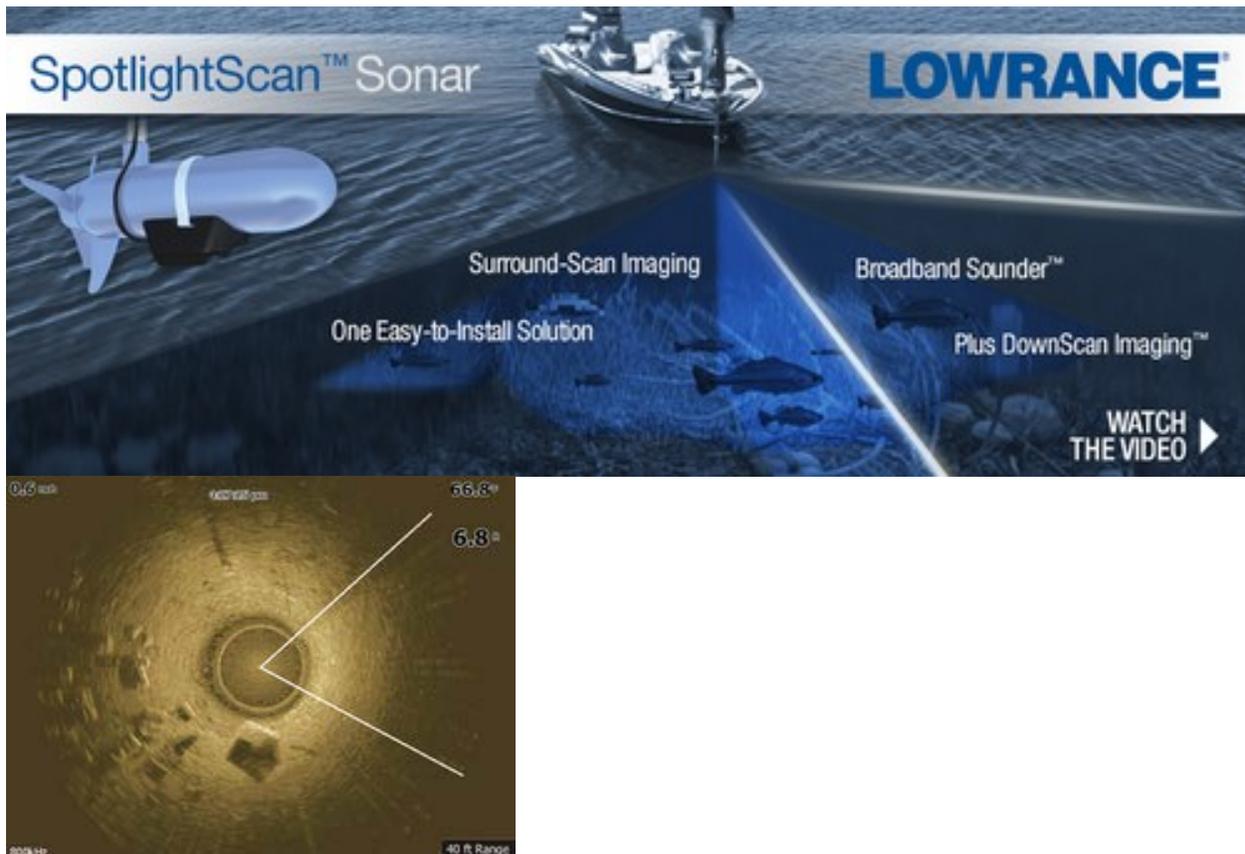
Humminbird 360 Imaging – Introduced in 2012, it was the bomb in the fishing world. It could be mounted to a cable-steer trolling motor or a Deployment System that's lowered below the hull. The beam's view can be limited to 10-degree increments, allowing you to zoom-in on a particular spot.

This unit truly allows you to fish like Professional Bass Fishermen Gerald Swindle says, “Fish in front of the fish, Fish where they’re going instead of where they were”. You can stay on top of schooling-fish and baitfish balls without spooking either one.

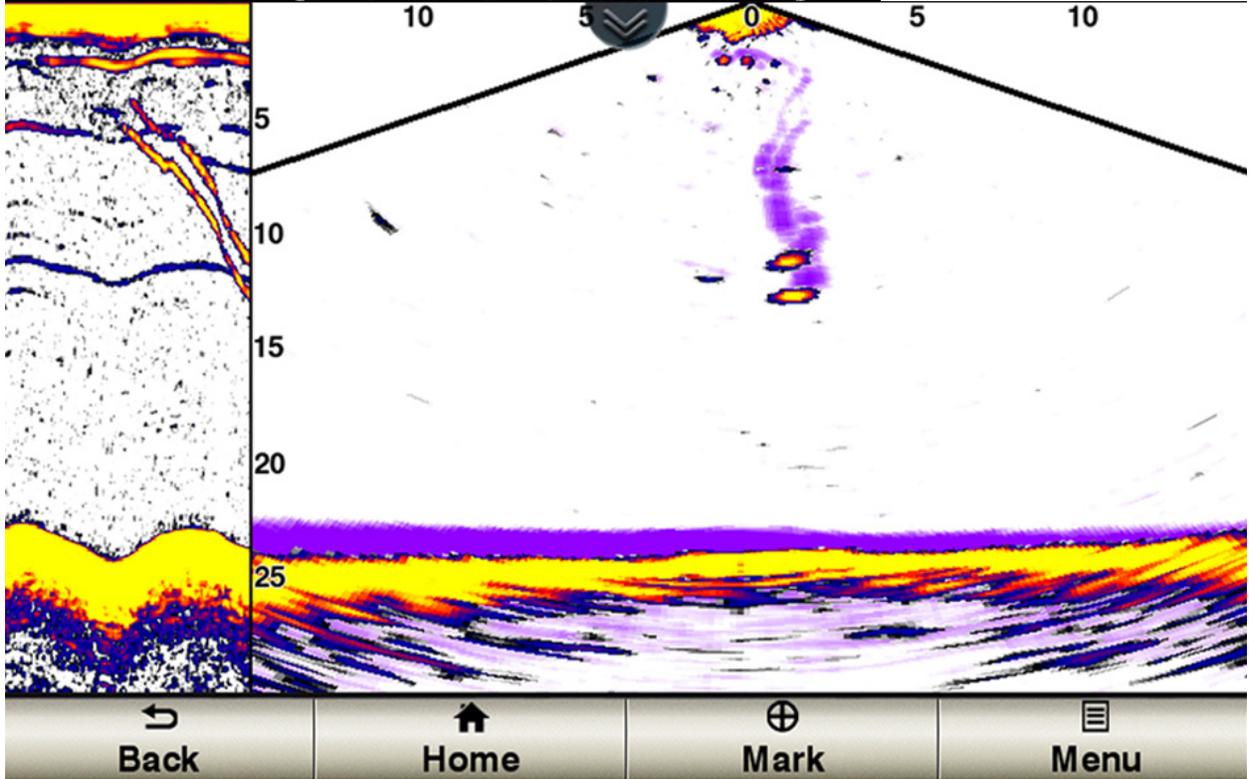
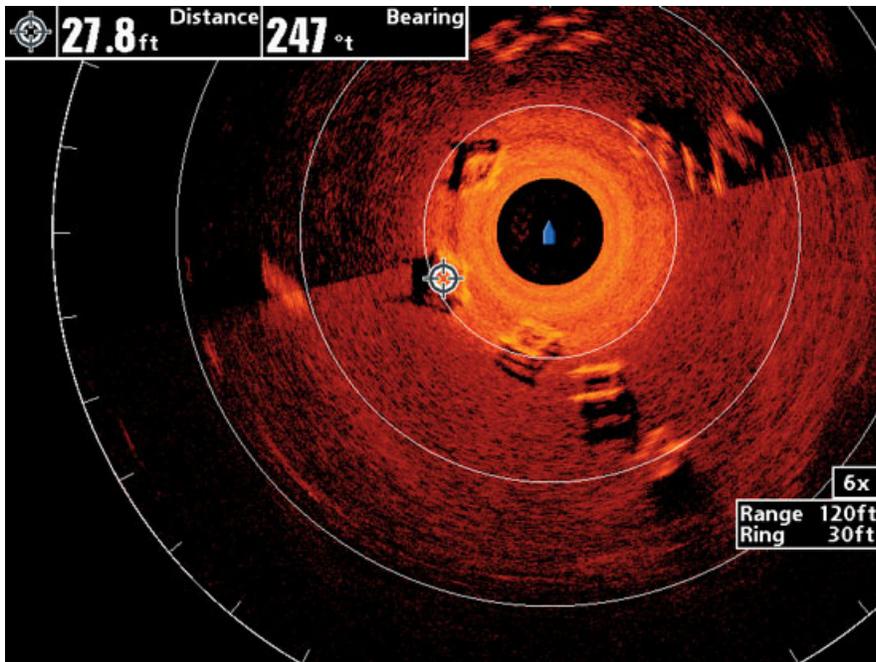
Lowrance Spotlight and Forward Scan – This unit is Navico’s version of 360 Imaging, available in Lowrance and Simrad MFD’s. It’s Angler-Controlled Directional Sonar. It’s mainly used for targeting fish in front of the boat. This imaging system is ideal for shallow water. It will look up to 8 times the depth forward, thus in 12 feet water, you can see up to 120 feet ahead.

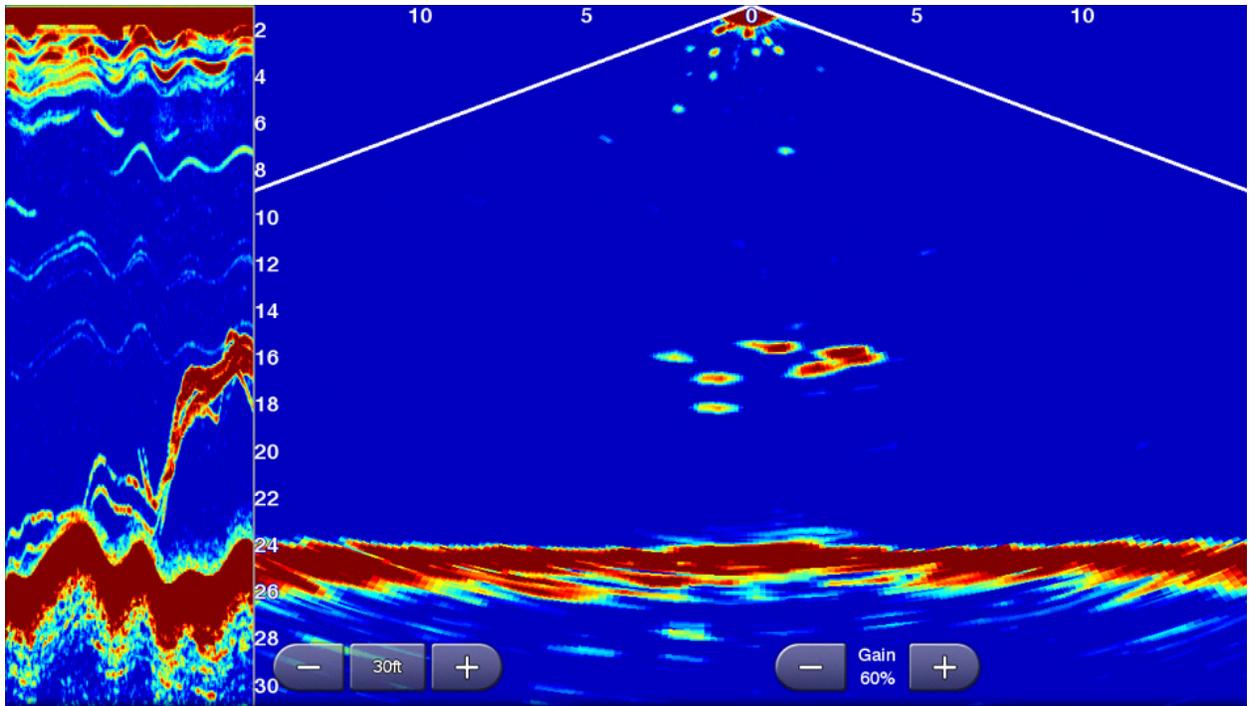
Things to Remember - With any new technology, there’s got to be drawbacks. I can only speak for myself. The main drawback I find with Forward Looking Sonar is that the transducer must be mounted to a cable steer trolling motor. Electric steer trolling motors cannot be used. Since 80% of crappie fishermen use electric steer motors they’ll have to either use the Humminbird Deployment System on the Humminbird or the Minn Kota Ultrex. I’m told that do make after-market mounts for electric-steer trolling motors that allow the Humminbird 360 to attach but the doctor is still out on the Lowrance and Garmin.

Conclusion - Whether you make the switch to 360 imaging or not, it’s up to you, all I can tell you is 360 imaging is around to stay and it has changed the fishing game. It’s like all technology, the older it gets, the less expensive it becomes. Give it a while and it’ll be like side and down imaging, affordable. It will save you from fishing “Dead Water”, I can guarantee you it will show you the fish, making them bite is another story and another article. *Bernard*

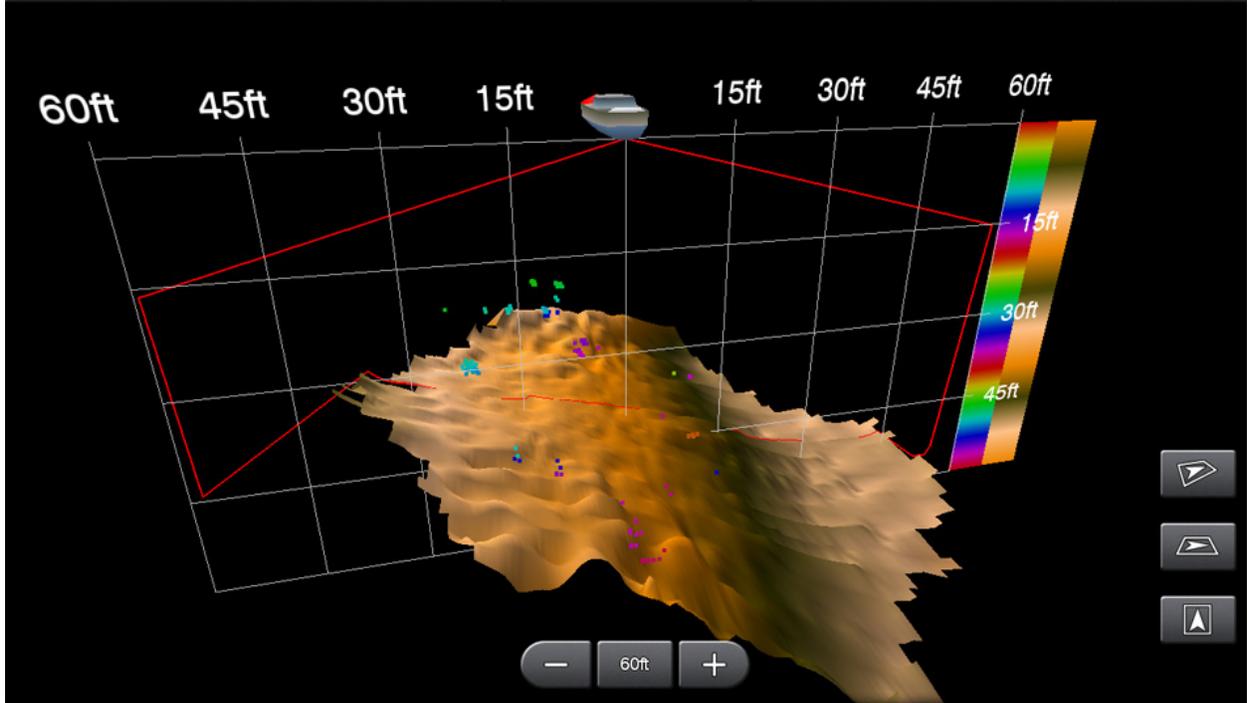








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