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Information, Assessment and Community

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An Analytical View of Intelligent Video

It seems like just yesterday I was walking my first security show, marveling at the latest in technology. Actually, that was 1986, but the memories of that carnival atmosphere still persist. Sauntering down Sensor Alley, the salesmen in their plaid coats barked out the greatest innovations in dual-beam technology and infrared. Then on to the Land of Access Control, where the trusty Wiegand Man would dazzle you with his wire act. Finally the tour ended in Tube World, where the finest CCTV technology of the day was displayed. Not a hint of CCD, digital or IP anywhere.

Today, if you're not one with the Web or hooked on convergence, you feel even more ancient than the town locksmith. There is no doubt the pace of technology advancement is hectic and often threatening. Take the case of the burgeoning intelligent video (IV) or video analytics marketplace. I'm sure some of you can feel your eyes begin to glaze over when some MIT hotshot starts popping off about complex algorithms, using XML over TCP/IP, or shifting from pixel-based video to object-based through MPEG-7.

What you really want to hear is how this technology is going to increase your organization's overall performance. Will other parts of the organization be able to tap into previously unavailable data? Will it improve your overall bottom line or provide a return on investment?

Many vendors are beginning to understand that overwhelming you with their widgets and gizmos is not good business. "The main thing that we need to convey as a technology is that we are proactive," said Steve Birkmeier, VP of marketing for Artec Vision Systems. "There are a lot of misconceptions in the market about intelligent video that are made worse by depictions in movies and TV. Most business owners want a digital solution, but they think they can't afford it. In many cases that is not the case. We (intelligent video vendors) need to do a better job of getting rid of the price objections."

And that has been an issue. Companies like ObjectVideo, VistaScape, Aimetis, Mate, Cernium, 3VR, ioimage and Vidient all have had high-end video analytic solutions in the market and have certainly battled the cost factor. Vendors have also struggled to convince users that mainstream organizations could benefit from a focused intelligent video strategy.

"As for us on the product side, we decided we had to make our options more flexible," said Birkmeier. "Now that is our biggest edge. When you talk about mainstreaming IV, you have to realize that the level of sophistication and the almost limitless number of features are things most of our customers will never use. So we are looking to attract those who want to step into the technology, but not necessarily take advantage of everything we offer."

Simplicity and functionality are becoming more the norm as most IP-based video vendors like Axis, Verint, Nice, DVTel, IndigoVision, Westec, IPIX and Dedicated Micros are either offering video analytic packages of their own or strategically aligning themselves with a provider. This mainstreaming has brought price points down. "Intelligent video software technology has thrust video surveillance into a new world. We've gone from an after-the-fact, capture and replay tool into a proactive asset that can now let responders more easily detect suspicious activities and breaches of security protocol," said Vidient CTO Skip Cusack at a recent technology forum. "We have transformed video into an IT-based function, and as these systems progress, the skills IT professionals have honed over the years will have direct impact on physical security applications. IT professionals are known for being visionaries, and they will become a driving force in this entire convergence of technology."

With this increased vision, video analytic software sales are expected to top out around \$840 million by 2009, according to IMS Research. It will be up to vendors and users alike to decide what belongs on the security network and what stays in the next James Bond movie.



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