

“In a slow, post 9/11 economy, there has been a growing focus for some on matters of security and affordability.

New Video for Better Post-9/11 Security

By Howard Greenfield

An upswing of interest in application offerings such as remote video access, automated camera operation, and distant news-gathering is evident in recent corporate mergers, US congressional hearings, and industry-wide budget tightening.

What seems clear from many of these new developments are significant functional advances in private and public safety systems and some new twists on how news is obtained and broadcast.

We normally think of security in terms of CCTV surveillance, data encryption, or maybe even infrared intrusion detectors. However, recent events continue to push proactive security measures for public spaces in new directions. 'Biometric' analysis - human identification through recognition of physical characteristics such as facial features and fingerprints - has now become much more relevant.

And because video can be processed with increasingly effective real-time data enhancement tools, the use of digital video content for facial recognition, object tracking, and forensic evidence is changing the way security systems work for us.

Last month, two of the biggest companies in the field, Identix, digital fingerprint application specialists, and Visionics, graphic facial recognition experts, merged to create a E681 million (£420 million) force that will offer end-to-end systems combining facial and fingerprint technologies with their video product partners. Calling this an industry-defining event, "the end game is all about providing security solutions, not really about just biometrics" said Identix Chief Executive Officer Robert McCashin who becomes Chairman of the new company formed in the Visionics merger, which should be completed by the end of June.

(continued)



NBC Camera surveillance on Ground Zero site.

So, what is the real significance of these sleuthing techniques to the video industry? The answer seems to be the power created by the sum of the parts: the security solution puzzle is much more complete when video surveillance and broadcast are introduced. For example, Identix's Facelt facial recognition technology is used in several town centre operations in the UK, the US, and is under test at various airports.

The key enabler? Video. The deployed systems' cameras automatically scan the faces of passers-by, and compare them with the control room's database of criminal photographs. Upon finding a match, the system alerts a human operator to verify the subject's identity and determine whether police action is required. If no match is determined, the data is then discarded.

Numerous technology companies are also now discussing future strategies and new technology qualifications for better public protection at even higher government levels. The United States Congress has been conducting hearings to determine which research, products, and services should be considered for homeland security and counter-terrorism efforts.

On March 12, LiveWave's CEO, Peter Mottur testified before the US House Armed Services Committee's review on defence modernisation stating: "The Department of Defence, in light of the events of 11

September 2001, has elevated efforts to transform our armed forces to meet the nation's needs in the century ahead. Many have concluded that this transformation will depend, in large part, on making better use of innovative technologies being generated throughout the private sector, including both defence and non-defence companies."



Ground Zero, World Trade Center, New York as viewed by camera.

Products, such as LiveWave's VirtualPerimeter serve as on-site video network surveillance systems that feature remote controllable cameras networked via fibre, satellite or wireless to improve security. However, some of the same core automation features are also enhancing the broadcast news business. As he spoke before congress, similar technology components had been deployed for monitoring purposes at the World Trade Center.

The compelling driver behind the popularity of both security and cost saving capabilities are the various uses of automation functionality such as remote video access and automated camera studios. For instance, according to LiveWave, USA Today is beginning to generate video news inserts for Gannett created by columnists reporting their stories on camera in real-time from their respective locations. Remote control camera studios in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington all feed into a Virginia site where the director and operator sit. The resulting benefit is a highly affordable increase in news information available to audiences and a greater timeliness in getting the content to them.

We are beginning to see a wide range of new security solutions and tools that provide the means for cutting costs in various broadcast situations. These applications even extend to weather reporting and contingency news-gathering.

What is apparent is that security and news automation products and systems are gaining ground. Wider acceptance and momentum are now only timing issues as the new technologies, functions and services are improved and become less expensive and more widely available. As Security Electronics magazine recently stated, "Digital video management systems are here to stay" and they will improve and expand our current capabilities "whether you like it or not" (John Thomas).

One thing is certain, adoption will only increase with the heightened needs and inevitable focus of government as well as private sector industries such as Travel, Insurance, Aviation, and Energy that all demand better safety, surveillance, and security solutions.

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Howard Greenfield is a freelance writer who has held leadership roles in Fortune 1000 and some of Silicon Valley's top companies including Sun Microsystems, Informix Software, General Foods/Kraft, University of California, Apple Computer and was VP, Product Marketing at Obvious Technology and Sofface. He is principal of Go Associates, a leading consultancy that develops and implements high-tech product marketing and business development strategies. Howard also currently serves on the board of BlueVoice, a non-profit marine life preservation organization.