The 7 Myths of Video Analytics

The 7 myths of Video Analytics (Video Content Analysis or VCA)

1. **VCA doesn't work in the real world**

It's true that VCA typically over-sold and under-delivered when it first became available. Like many technologies, it appeared to be a solution looking for a problem. With fingers burned, many turned their backs on its potential.

It's also true that VCA doesn't always match up to the initial over-the-top hype. But it is being used more and more in real world scenarios where it matches client requirements rather than wishes. Where appropriate, VCA is a formidable and smart addition to CCTV solutions.

2. **VCA is basically motion detection**

A cunning assertion propagated by camera manufacturers who really should know better, struggling as they are to add value to samey hardware. To the incautious, Intelligent Video Motion Detection sounds just like Intelligent Video Content Analysis but the technology isn't even close. VMD can't handle dynamic environments, track moving objects, differentiate objects of interest by anything other than size or even recognise anything other than a change in a pixel dot. It's useless for anything but static and sterile environments – if that's all you need, fine, but don't let camera manufacturers get away with claiming anything else.

3. **All VCA is the same**

To the unwary, this is true. The truth is that the *goals* of VCA developers are common – to intelligently analyse CCTV images and video and to thereby add value by alerting clients to events that require attention. The goal is to alleviate the all too human inability to handle multiple feeds or even to monitor a handful of cameras for more than twenty minutes.

Hence the term Video Content Analysis. But all developers of VCA are not the same and it pays not to be blinded by patents, size of research departments or multiple PhDs. Prospective customers need simply ask themselves: does it work for me in my environment and with my staff in the real world?

Don't buy theory.

4. **VCA is almost impossible to use unless you are an expert**

Again, for some suppliers this is true. There are multiple tales of supplier engineers setting up a system to work perfectly yet non-experts remain unable to do the same. Usability is a key facet of any technology and VCA has done itself no favours in this area over recent years.

But like all technologies, this can be solved by the supplier taking the time to focus on the customer. Make sure your prospective supplier has taken this time (as we believe we have) because the difference in usefulness in any technology and specifically with VCA is more often to do with usability than starry algorithms.

5. **License plate recognition (LPR) uses VCA**

This is a big falsehood. It is true that Videalert's traffic management solution uses VCA for applications that have more traditionally used LPR (there are multiple advantages to the use of VCA). The truth is, LPR is old technology – basically it is optical character recognition (OCR) repackaged and refined. Sure it works, but be under no illusion that LPR is doing anything other than reading a string of characters.

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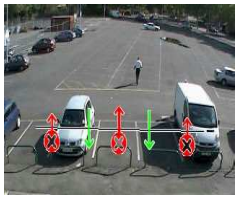
6. TV and film accurately represent what VCA can do



This would seem to be an easy myth to dispel but we are continuously surprised by how many customers seem to expect VCA to be able to replicate what they've seen on '24' or 'CSI'.

After 9/11, demand for technology that could recognise faces in a crowd tempted some technology companies to encourage projects which inevitably failed. The negative reaction to this failure and others, where the IT industry simply couldn't deliver on raised expectations, led to wide-spread disaffection in the security world. The polar opposites described in this myth – sky high expectations from customer, disaffection from experts – creates a burden only recently lightening as VCA finds its way.

The bottom line is this: VCA is wonderful at certain things and next to useless at others. Make sure you know one from the other.

7. False alerts are a big problem for VCA

Wrong – false alerts are a big problem for any security system. In fact, most implementations of any security system assume significant false alerts will occur. It *appears* to be a greater problem for VCA systems because they tend to be connected to many, many cameras.

Moreover, as reported in the New York Times, Boeing's well-publicised problems with a massive security system for the US-Mexico border haven't helped. Perhaps it would be truer to say: false alerts *can be* a problem for VCA *if* applicability and usability are not a high enough priority.

It appears Boeing didn't take enough account (indeed, any) of the needs of the users of their system, the border guards themselves. Make sure you don't make the same mistake.

So, let's stop confusing our terms. VMD is not VCA. LPR is not VCA. Real VCA is a huge technical step up from simple VMD technologies, often built by small innovative companies who have cracked the immensely difficult problem of dealing with dynamic real world scenes after many years of tough field trials and experience. So, when you are looking to add intelligence to your CCTV cameras, as the old saying goes: caveat emptor!

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