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Security watchdog

Surveillance is Multivision's big business in the climate of fear promulgated by Sept 11

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These days, it's hard to tell whether a clock on the wall is really just a clock, or a hidden camera recording your every move. Whole businesses are built on surveillance, with the industry worth billions of dollars worldwide. Multivision is one such business. Founded in 1986 by a group of closed-circuit television (CCTV) engineers, the Hong Kong-based company started developing digital video surveillance products in 1997 and now has a number of large projects under its belt. These include Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok Airport, Lantau Fixed Crossing, and the Mass Transit Railway System.

At the core of Multivision's business is the philosophy of developing products based on open systems architecture. The company's digital surveillance solutions include the NetCorder DIY for the personal and SOHO (small office-home office) market, NetServer series for SMEs (small- to medium-sized enterprises), and the Unet Client Workstation for enterprise surveillance management.

Multivision is in the process of expanding its operations to Southeast Asia and the rest of the world in a global move helmed by chief operating officer Dennis Li, hired last year to oversee Multivision's expansion into the global surveillance market. He now spearheads the company's foray into Southeast Asia. He talks to *The Edge Singapore* about digital surveillance trends and the company's plans for Singapore and the region.

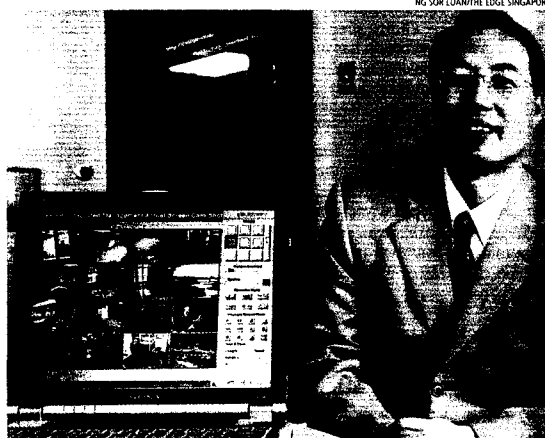
The Edge Singapore: What's the current demand like for digital surveillance?

It's definitely increasing. While many markets are experiencing a decline in demand and market growth, we are experiencing double-digit growth. Based on a report by Freeman Associates, the surveillance market's growth rate has

increased from 6.0 to 9.0 per cent, to over 15 per cent following Sept 11. People are migrating from older-generation analog systems to digital ones. Unlike tape, digitally recorded material is more reliable and of better quality. Once an image is recorded in digital format, there are many things you can do — transmit, index, archive, do facial matching. Also, many structures are being built where surveillance and security form the core component of the project. Sept 11 aside, recent political events have caused heightened demand and awareness. People are getting a bit nervous, realising that life is not going to go back to normal. If premises have surveillance equipment installed, people may feel that buildings are safer than the streets.

Why does Multivision use open systems architecture?

It allows us to link to other types of technology and vice versa without having to do a lot of work. We can use technological advances to suit our range of solutions. For example, we base our programs on the Intel platform. Every few months, Intel comes up with newer processors and faster speeds at lower cost. If I adapt to the Intel platform my product is cost-effective, and I can increase hardware performance without having to spend much money. Also, integration with devices is easier. If everything is proprietary, the linking of systems will be very difficult. But if we base our products on an open standard, the sharing of information can be easily achieved.



With over 30 years of experience in marketing for IT, Li's mandate at Multivision is to expand the company's operations to Southeast Asia and worldwide.

Tell us about some of Multivision's projects.

Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok Airport was a very complicated experience. We had to tie in the surveillance system with infrastructure development. We're still working on the airport, which is expanding its surveillance requirements as it grows. We also have another major project with the State Rail Authority in Australia to implement surveillance systems in 302 train stations and two weeks ago, we signed with the Bangkok Transit System for work on 20 train stations.

Is Multivision launching new products?

We've just launched NetServer Pro and NetServer Smart. NetServer Pro is an extension of the NetServer range, with faster frame rates. NetServer Smart is a portable solution that's swappable, made for mobile environments.

Both NetServer Pro and NetServer Smart use MPEG 4 compression, which gives reasonable quality video that's better than VCDs but not as good as DVDs. We'll be launching NetServer Super in two or three months' time. It will use MPEG 2 compression, which will deliver DVD-quality video.

Will you be developing biometrics-based products?

Our focus is on surveillance. While biometrics is related to security, we prefer to approach the market by owning the technology that we have. We currently own everything from the video capture board to the software. There are already many dominant players in the biometrics market, so if we were to venture into biometrics, we

would have to spend a lot of money. Based on our open systems standard approach, we can interface and integrate technology — including biometric systems — without being an owner.

What are Multivision's plans for growth?

We've already covered Greater China and Hong Kong so our next logical step is to expand into Southeast Asia and Europe as part of continuous growth. We've had a distributor in Singapore for quite some time, but we now want to have a direct presence ourselves so that we can do much better. Singapore will be the regional centre for Southeast Asia. We're focusing on large infrastructure projects because they demonstrate our ability and distinguish us from the competition in ways other than price. ■