All-seeing eye for CCTV surveillance

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Video: A new system combines hours of footage to help operators

In some cities, CCTV is a victim of its own success: the number of cameras means there is not enough time to review the tapes. That could change, with software that can automatically summarise the footage.

"We take different events happening at different times and show them together," says Shmuel Peleg of BriefCam based in Nave Ilan, Israel, a company he co-founded based on his work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. "On average an hour is summarised down to a minute."

The software relies on the fact that most surveillance cameras are stationary and so record a static background. This makes it possible for the software to detect and extract sections of the video when anything moving enters the scene. All events occurring in a given time period, say an hour, are then superimposed to create a short video that shows all of the action at once (see video).

If something of interest is spotted while watching the summary, the operator can click on it to jump straight to the relevant point in the original CCTV footage. BriefCam's software has been shortlisted as a finalist for the 2010 Global Security Challenge prize at its conference in London this week.