

New funding for Viewdle, which lets smartphones 'see'

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Image: viewdle.com

High-powered players are pumping 10 million dollars into Viewdle, a technology startup crafting ways to let smartphones "see" things the same way people do and identify faces.

The influx of cash announced this week is coming from [Qualcomm](#), BlackBerry Partners Fund, US electronics retail chain Best Buy, and Anthem Venture Partners, an investment firm that has backed Viewdle from the outset.

"We are giving smartphones human eyes," Viewdle co-founder and chief executive Laurent Gil told AFP.

"Letting them see the world the way people do... it is [artificial intelligence](#)," he said. "It is happening."

Northern California-based Viewdle bills itself as the leading independent facial recognition company for consumer gadgets. Its technology is developed by the company's research team in the Ukraine.

Viewdle has already released a test version of the software, which lets desktop computers recognize people in pictures being uploaded to Facebook. The new funding will be used to launch new products in coming months.

Viewdle now boasts technology that allows smartphones to recognize people as soon as cameras take pictures or videos showing their faces.

"For consumers, it's all about real-time," said Best Buy Capital managing partner Kuk Yi.

"Viewdle is leading the market by creating compelling consumer experiences that are both real-time and cross-platform -- that is why we invested in the company."

The technology depends on machine learning, with users "teaching" computers what their friends look like. That recognition is then shared between devices over the Internet, according to Gil.

"Because you have a picture of a friend on your [desktop computer](#), it will tell your mobile phone," Gil said.

"By the time I take a picture with the phone, it knows it is my friend when the image is captured. I can then share it or post it to Facebook immediately and it is already tagged."



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Gil sees the technology feeding a hot trend of augmented reality in which scenes seen through smartphone camera lenses are enhanced with virtual characters, objects or data.

Smartphones and tablet computers have grown powerful enough to support software that lets devices distinguish people from their settings in the same way the human eye does, according to the chief executive.

"We are just at the beginning of augmented reality using visual computing," Gil said.

"The first application is face recognition, but the real opportunity is the ability of the machine to take action depending on what it sees in the environment around it. This is similar to how the human brain works."

Viewdle is the result of 15 years of research, rooted in work done at The Cybernetics Institute in Kiev, and got its first infusion of investor money -- 2.5 million dollars -- in June 2008.

"With this investment, we're enabling consumers to take advantage of the best [facial recognition](#) platform available," said Qualcomm director of business development Jay Wright.

"Viewdle has the proven technology, team and vision. They are the major player in the visual analysis market."

More information: More information about the company is available online at viewdle.com.

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