

labor unions to protect the fruits of American ingenuity and to use them in forging an anchor for good jobs in America.

For information on the alliance visit www.americaningenuity.org.

Ian Chan Hodges is a principal of Responsible Markets LLC on Maui. He can be reached via e-mail at chanhodges@hawaii.rr.com

[BACK TO TOP](#)

TECH VIEW

Wireless Web cameras aid surveillance efforts

Kimman Wong

Remember those cheesy spy-cam "X10" pop-up ads from a few years ago? You couldn't get away from them. They would show a pretty blond woman sitting seductively in her living room in a bikini. Don't ask me why she'd be hanging out at home in front of a Web cam in a bikini, but that's what was depicted.

Despite those silly ads, I've found that Web cams (or "spy cams") have their place at home. If you need to keep an eye on the keiki, or perhaps on your ailing grandma, Web cameras offer a cheap, simple solution.

Unfortunately, like most peripherals, PC-based video and Web cameras need a live computer to connect your remote access to the Internet. Wireless Web cams first came out a few years ago and have improved both in quality and ease of installation. Think of them as a networking device, linking directly to either 802.11b (Wi-Fi) wireless access points or on Ethernet cable-based networks. Thus you'll need a simple network already installed to add the camera.

(Note that a "spy cam" can be either a hidden camera viewed through a TV or on the Web. The type viewed through a TV can be seen on a local network -- say, at your home -- but not necessarily on the World Wide Web. A true "Web cam" can be seen anywhere there's a PC connection to the Net.)

You can buy any number of "spy cams," ranging from excellent \$200 to \$300 models to so-called hidden surveillance or "nanny" cameras that are disguised as clocks, AM/FM radios, light bulbs, speakers and other familiar household objects (see www.digital-pc.com). Then there are our old friends at X10.com, who offer a variety of kits that provide all the gear you need to broadcast video and audio directly to a TV or VCR so you can tape your sessions just like the pros.

Most of the models are built around inexpensive video cameras that can be mounted on an interior or exterior wall or on a surface such as a shelf or table. They transmit wireless signals at 2.4 GHz, much like cordless phones, or on 802.11b wireless local area networks. (Note that these types of "spy cams" do not work on the Web.)

It may seem spooky at first, but these devices really come in handy if you want to keep tabs on your baby sitter or just to be certain that when the kids are suddenly quiet, they are not up to mischief. There also are obvious uses such as seeing who's at the front door or even in the back yard if you're concerned about who's prowling around after dark.

I've heard of a family that uses a camera to monitor a child who is subject to asthma attacks, and others who find it useful for convalescing adults or children.

The basic X10 \$80 XCam2 kit consists of a camera that broadcasts in color and a receiver. The camera plugs into a power outlet, and the receiver plugs into a TV or through your VCR. The camera itself is about the size of a golf ball, so it's pretty inconspicuous. The X10 also provides an option for a USB converter so you can view live video from your XCam2 cameras on your PC rather than a television.

One word of caution: Before installing any wireless equipment, it's important to be aware of security and privacy risks. The New York Times reported that security experts (and hackers) can intercept X10 signals from more than a quarter-mile away using basic equipment.

Kimman Wong, general manager of Internet services at Oceanic Time Warner Cable, is an engineer by training and a full-time computer geek by profession. Questions or comments should be addressed to kiman.wong@oceanic.com

Be well informed before choosing a camera

If you're serious about setting up a high quality Web-cam system, Andrew Lanning, a Honolulu-based security specialist and president of Integrated Security Technologies (www.istechs.net) suggests that you start by purchasing gear that is designed for the environment in which it will be operating.

For example, if you're setting up an outdoor camera, keep in mind that lenses are limited in their capacity to "see" in changing lighting and focal plane conditions. In general, cheaper cameras have poorer imaging capabilities. It's important to get the proper imaging technology in place so the action that you wish to capture is rendered with the proper focus and resolution.

Second, Lanning advises that you set up a Web-cam system that meets your needs and lifestyle. "For example, when your children come in the door from school each day, it may be more convenient to have the cameras that send a still image of their arrival to your office PC or enabled telephone rather than for you to have to log on and watch a live camera until you see that they are there."

He suggests that "serious" users check out equipment from www.axis.com.

The Axis camera server lets you attach any standard NTSC camera for digital image transmission via HTML, Java, FTP or even e-mail. Sony also offers a line of professional-grade IP cameras, as do D-Link and other manufacturers.

Lanning also likes software-based digital video recorders (DVRs), which are available through Lenel Systems International (www.lenel.com/onguard/video_LNVR.htm). These recorders permit the user to record (to an external USB hard drive, for example) and manage digital video

streams through a software interface.

Proper management makes it easy to record and recall only the images that are important to the user, such as when a door opens or closes, or when someone approaches an object or travels down a corridor.

Software-based recorders can be purchased a single video channel at a time (\$200), which brings the expense of professional digital recording into the budget of the small commercial business or homeowner.

Finally, the recorded video is only as reliable as the computer management practices that maintain it. Businesses and homeowners alike need to deploy anti-virus and anti-spam technologies on their DVRs or digital recording PCs. They must perform daily backups, maintain software patches, install firmware and security upgrades, and they must test their system's functionality frequently to ensure that it's working properly. You don't want to miss that one opportunity you had to catch the action.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

[Letter to the editor]

By George Toyama

[Project labor agreements](#) might not be in the best interests of anyone in Hawaii, with the exception of union leaders as they work toward increasing their membership rolls, and thus increasing their take through membership dues.

Local [contractors](#), both union and nonunion, should protest any form of PLA. PLAs allow nonunion contractors to use the resources that union companies have developed. Time, money and other efforts were used to develop workers by union contractors over the course of many years through the use of apprenticeship and other programs.

Many times, workers were kept on payroll during slow market periods at