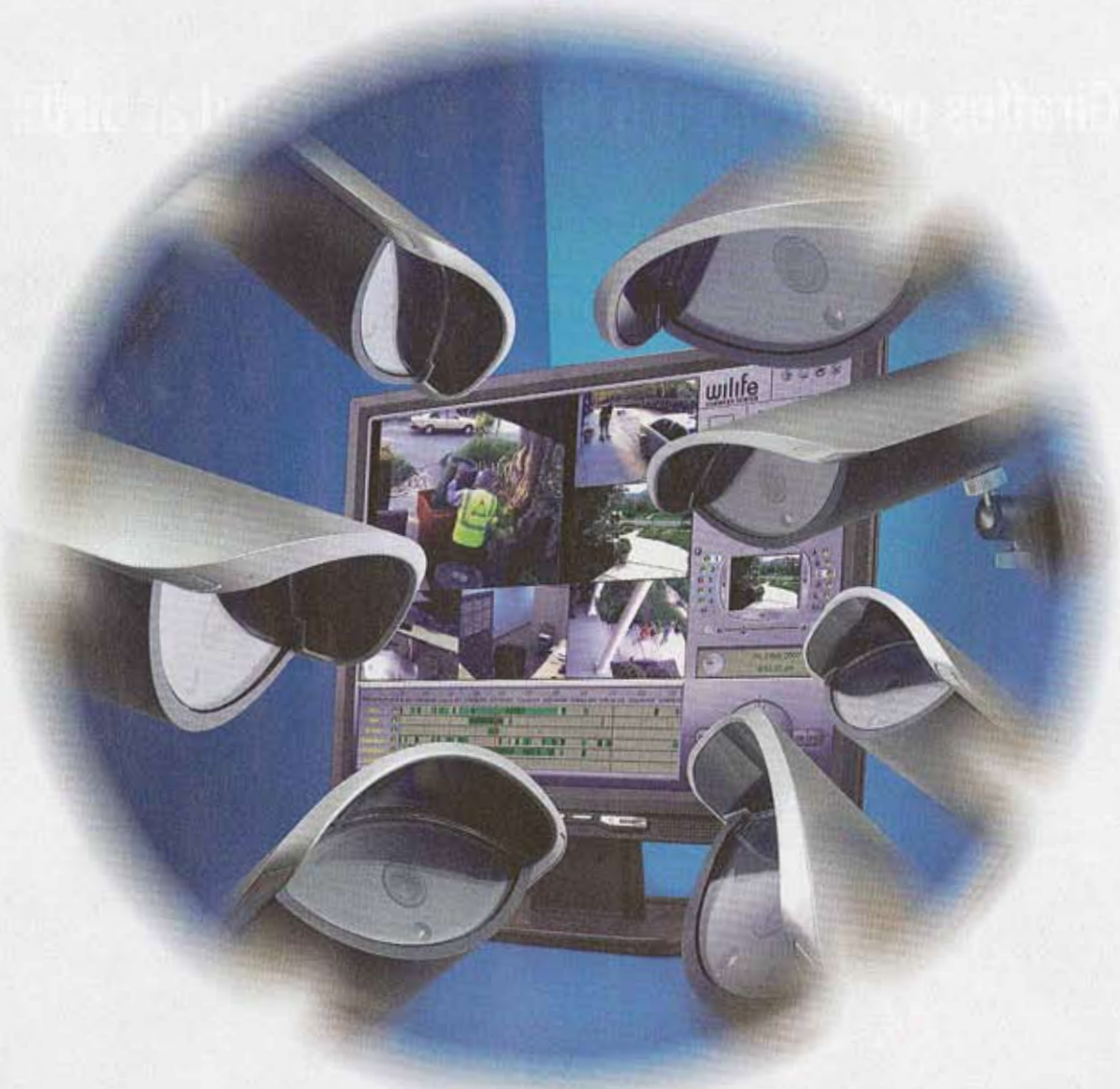


DIY Home Security

Here's a simple, low-cost way to keep an eye on your house.

By Daniel Lyons



SUMMER SOON WILL DRAW to a close and you'll be shuttering the lake house. Maybe you'd like to keep an eye on the place because you're paranoid or nostalgic or both. An easy way to do this is a simple system from WiLife, a

tiny company in Draper, Utah. Using low-cost cameras hooked to a personal computer with an Internet connection, WiLife offers reliable video surveillance that is a bargain compared with the offerings from central monitoring services like ADT.

WiLife makes three cameras: one for outdoors, one for indoors and a third disguised as an alarm clock. The first two cost \$300. The clock spy cam is \$330 and has been a hot seller. WiLife also sells a Night-Vision kit that lets its indoor cameras capture footage in the dark. You can mount the

cameras with a suction cup or with a few screws. After the first camera, additional ones start at \$230; you can have a total of no more than six. So a maxed-out six-camera setup comes to \$1,480.

A four-camera system from home security company ADT would be more expensive. This company (part of Tyco International) won't quote prices for multicamera systems, but it confesses that a single camera costs \$699 to \$1,700, plus installation fees and a \$35-per-month charge for hooking your house to its central monitoring service. ADT dings you another \$10 a month if you want to view your feeds over the Internet.

WiLife's do-it-yourself installation starts by having you load software onto your Windows PC (there's no support for Macs). You plug WiLife's video receiver into the wall and connect it via USB cable to your PC. Plug the cameras into any power outlet in the house and they begin sending video to the receiver. WiLife's products use a technology called HomePlug, which sends video signals over the electrical wires in your house. One snag is that gear plugged into power strips won't work. You have to plug directly into an outlet. The system works best in buildings 10,000 square feet or less, though for most people that's not a problem.

WiLife captures a constant stream from all your cameras and can record and store footage continuously or only when a camera detects motion. From your PC at home you can view all of the camera feeds at once or bounce around from one to the next like a security guard. You can also set up the software to send you an e-mail alert with a video-clip attached when it detects motion.

The WiLife system can store as much video as you have hard drive space for. As

a benchmark, WiLife says, 20 gigabytes will store six weeks of video from four cameras. Once your space fills up, older data get flushed out as new data arrive.

WiLife's software is inelegant but easy to understand, with big buttons and clearly marked functions. You can figure it out just by mousing around a bit. To view remotely from another PC you need a broadband Internet connection at home and an account with WiLife (it's free). Log on to your account on the WiLife site from any computer and you can view your camera feeds. There's no sound, just silent video. The video is grainy, and the colors aren't great. But it's good enough.

You can also view your camera feeds

in the feed would show up immediately in the computer. Opening an account with WiLife took only a few minutes. Next day, from my office a few towns away, I logged in to my WiLife account and found my camera feeds.

At first I could not view a constant stream, only a time-delayed three-minute snippet. But in a few minutes on the phone WiLife's tech support guys helped me manually configure my router so that I could see a constant stream. WiLife says 80% of customers get the constant feed automatically, while others, like me, have to do some fiddling with their router. I set up the remote feeds on a browser at my office and left it on all day so I could

glance over and see live video of my kids running around at home.

I must warn you: This becomes addictive. WiLife says its customers develop an emotional connection with its product. You might install the cameras at your weekend home initially just for security reasons, only to discover that you can now sit in your office and admire the view from your house in the Hamptons or slopeside at Snowbird. WiLife says 55% of customers are homeowners. The other 45% are small-business owners who use the cameras to watch their stores and offices.

In June WiLife introduced a new version of its

software that runs on Microsoft's Windows Vista operating system. This 2.0 version boasts a cool feature that lets you watch stored recordings from a remote computer. Another new feature is a digital pan-tilt-zoom that lets you focus in on any part of a camera's viewing area. WiLife says its software runs equally well on either Vista or XP, so use whichever you prefer.

When Internet monitoring becomes well established, who will pay monthly tribute to alarm companies? Try out the WiLife system. If you like it, short-sell some Tyco shares. **F**



Snoop kit: A complete WiLife remote home-surveillance system includes a fake alarm clock camera and indoor and outdoor cams.

from any mobile phone that runs the Windows Mobile operating system, like the Motorola Q or Palm Treo 700wx. (Smartphones using other operating systems, like the BlackBerry or other Treos, don't do live feeds but can receive e-mail alerts with snapshots attached showing what triggered the motion detector.)

Installation on an old Windows XP machine was a snap. I put one camera in a window, facing out, and immediately got a feed. I tried the second camera, the alarm clock model, in various locations around the house. Each time I plugged it