

Securing your property gets easier, cheaper

What I paid five months ago for a large LCD TV would have cost me 10 times as much five years ago. The higher end laptops 10 years ago were at least \$3,000 and we can get for under \$1,000 today.

Too bad cars, trucks and SUVs do not follow that same trend. Today's vehicles have more of the cheaper technology in them yet we pay three times today what we used to buy a car for 20 years ago.

To keep all that stuff safe in our possession we must take security measures since thieves are still hitting Washington County very hard lately. That goes for inside Brenham city limits as well as out in the rural areas.

Last month we discussed how rural folks can secure their front entrance to deter low-life crooks from entering the property, but we need to cover some options to keep them out of the house if they get past the gate.

Luckily prices have dropped drastically on security camera and DVR technology over the past year. Three years ago I first wrote about the benefits of having CCTV cameras in your home or business recording to a DVR (Digital Video Recorder) that is connected to the Internet for remote access.

Back then just the DVR cost a couple



John Deans

of grand just to get started. With the cameras around \$300 and the cabling having to be professionally terminated the overall investment for a 500 GB equipped DVR with eight cameras installed was over \$5,000. Quality systems installed by local licensed professionals like Brenham Alarm Company can do a solid configuration

for about half that now.

But for those do-it-yourself types there are now some very low cost DVR/Camera packages available with everything included for under \$1,000. These security packages come with cables already terminated at lengths of 25', 50' or 100' with the connectors on them that carry both the optical signal and power.

The included compact power supply feeds up to eight cameras with an octopus fan-out connector array that is very simple to set up.

I have configured numerous security camera systems since I got my license from the DPS a few years ago and terminating camera cables was the most difficult part. Cutting the old style RG-59 coax cables and crimping on the BNC connectors was a pain in the tail. Then I had to strip down the power conductors to the copper and match the polarity on the expensive power supply.

After some frustrating camera projects over the past few years I was about to give up on that type of work until these new low cost camera and DVR packages came out. I was really interested in it when Computer Helpers started selling these do-it-yourself camera/DVR kits. Since they are not installing these systems, Computer Helpers is exempted from the DPS licensing process.

Since I have been in the security mode at our ranch over past several months due to all the break-ins around the county, I decided to purchase a package for myself and try it out.

For the retail price of around \$799 Harper at Computer Helpers handed me a box from Q-See with four color night-capable cameras with 100' pre-terminated cables, a small 8-camera power supply, LCD Monitor, and the 8-Port DVR equipped with 500GB worth of video storage. It also came with a USB mouse and remote control for easy screen navigation.

The DVR was quite small with BNC connectors for eight cameras, two USB ports, a VGA monitor port, and some alarm terminals. After connecting the LCD monitor, mouse, and network cable from my Linksys router the configuration was quite simple. I used the mouse and drilled down to through the Network icon to set my Static IP address of 192.168.1.99 which I knew

was not in use on our home Local Area Network.

From that point I jumped over to my laptop, browsed to that IP Address, and was able to see the DVR as a network node. Just before I did that I had to enable all the ActiveX settings on Internet Explorer like the instructions told me to do for the DVR's user interface to work properly.

Next I unpacked the cameras and cables to pre-test them to make sure they were operational before I ran the cables outside the house and mounted the cameras on my freshly sunk 7' post in front of our home.

Everything worked and looked good, so the work was on pulling the four 100' connector-ready cables through a hole I drilled in a closet floor, through a small trench-slit in the ground, and onto that single post.

A few hours later I was able to see 360 degrees around the area of the house including the gate, driveway, parking, house and garage on my laptop. Then I entered the Record option on the web-based management tool of the DVR to verify it was set to 'Record Always.'

Next I also enabled the Motion Detection under the Alarm menu to put flags on the recording when something significant moves on the field of views on each of the four installed cameras for quicker lookups.

Back at the DVR I went into the Mo-

bile menu to enable the password for the remote access by my iPhone. Once that was turned on I downloaded the free APlayer iPhone App from iTunes AppStore, configured that internal IP address, and was able to view all four video streams from my newly installed cameras on my iPhone via the network-based DVR.

Finally I set up our home router to map the manual-specified TCP port to that internal IP address so I can access it from outside of our home network. The final test was when I was able to successfully view all four cameras with live color motion video on my iPhone while at work.

Hopefully I will never have to play the video back of some dirt bags hauling out my stuff out of our home after the fact or having to hand over the digital recording to the Sheriff showing me shooting the vermin attempting to steal our stuff.

Bottom line: For under \$800, you can't beat such an easy self-installation of a powerful DVR and security camera system to help monitor your home or office.

Next week's column: Online ID theft services.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.