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OCTOBER 2000

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and young mom
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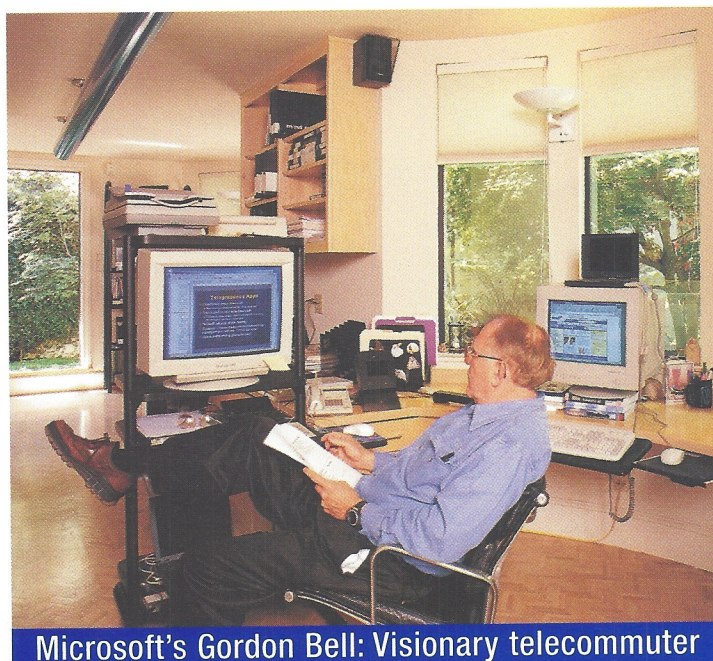
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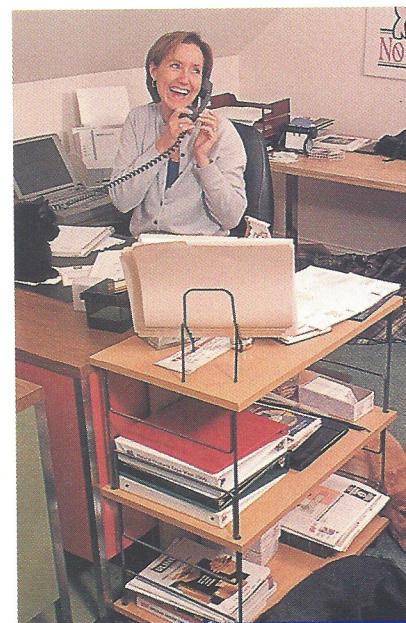
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High-tech products for home security

New surveillance systems use the Internet. BY ROBERT E. CALEM

A home office can be a safe haven, free of the crowds and noise that plague city towers and suburban office parks where the unlucky workers of the world congregate. But before you get too smug about your surroundings, consider this: Traditional office workers are usually protected by trained security guards and an assortment of sophisticated security cameras and burglar and fire alarms.

So just how safe is your home office, anyway?

If you answered “not very,” don’t worry. Some of that same high technology long used in commercial security systems is now available to homeowners — including motion detectors and hidden cameras that can look all around a room.

In addition, brand new home monitoring systems are emerging — ones that use the Internet in ways never before done in the security industry.

“Most of these security products started out in the commercial, industrial environment and then were adapted for residential use,” notes Don Moore, senior security consultant for Edison Security Inc. in Santa Monica, Calif. Moore specializes in designing security systems for the southern California mansions of secretive celebrities and anonymous moguls — and he has installed some unusual configurations in his clients’ homes.

One of Moore’s jobs was for an international celebrity with a mansion bordering a public beach. Moore installed four photo-

electric motion detector beams attached to four video cameras near the beachfront perimeter of the home. If a beachgoer’s frisbee lands on the property and he follows after it, guards at a remote monitoring facility will see him and can bark at him through speakers to go away. And, adds Moore, the homeowner can view his property from anywhere at anytime by using a computer with a modem.

A four-camera system

A basic video surveillance system uses four cameras, says Moore. The cameras are normally placed near the entry gate, as well as at the front door, inside the back yard, and in any vulnerable area or spot where an intruder might hide. Typically, the setup



also includes a device called a quad splitter; it allows you to view the video from the cameras on your television screen or computer monitor either in four windows or as full-screen images. The price for a basic surveillance system without motion detectors hovers around \$10,000.

With such a system, Moore notes, “You can keep an eye on your environment while you’re doing your work in your home office,” so you’ll know when the Fed-Ex guy pulls up to the front gate even before he rings the buzzer.

Most residential security cameras are

installed outside the home, but there are indoor options, too. One of the newest is the e-dome from Philips CSI, a division of the Dutch electronics giant based in Lancaster, Pa. In June — after two years of research and development — Philips introduced a tiny, 360-degree camera that is smaller than a ceiling fire sprinkler. It comes with a system that includes a desktop computer with a special video “capture card” installed, and all the cabling needed to hook them together. The price, approximately \$18,000, doesn’t include a video monitor.

The camera and the card are what make the e-dome unique, says Paul Bodell, director of product management at Philips CSI. The camera is equipped with a wide-angle lens that is only 1½-inches in diameter. It provides a conical view all around the room.

“If you can see it, it can see you,”

Bodell says. “It takes security cameras into the digital age,” he adds, explaining that the camera records the video digitally so that the computer can be used to play it back. Software on the computer also allows the user to zoom in on an area of the room, tilt up and down, and pan around the room at will — you can even look at several views at once. And because the video is digital, Bodell points out, it can be sent from one computer to another in a network.

By comparison, traditional security cameras point in only one direction — although they may sweep around a room — and the video they record is analog, so it’s not as easily manipulated.

The e-dome currently has some big limitations for use in most homes, Bodell concedes. It’s limited to one camera per computer, and the huge size of the digital video files it creates necessitates a computer network based on “gigabit ethernet” technology — now rare in a home environment.

Philips designed the e-dome for commercial use. But technology options expected within a year “could make it adaptable to