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Xcams with pan and tilt mount: like a Web cam on steroids

By Andrew Moore-Crispin, posted Mar 26, 2002



If you surf the Internet, you've probably come across pop-under ads for [X10.com](#)'s mini security cameras.

X10 has a wide range of products, focusing mostly on relatively inexpensive home security and home automation for the average household.

Their product line ranges from the rather superfluous [RoboDog](#) Barking Dog Alarm, which barks if an intruder enters the house, to the more useful four-piece [FireCracker](#) home control kit, which allows users to control lights and other electrical devices from their PC or the remote control unit, to their line of mini cameras and accessories.

We tested an X10 mini-cam, with a [Ninja](#) Pan and Tilt mount, with all necessary software and accessories to view the action on a PC or TV.

Setting it up

Choosing a good vantage point for the Ninja mount is the most important part of the set-up process. The Ninja base can pan 180 degrees, and tilt 70 degrees. When combined with the camera's 60 degrees of viewable area, the base offers an impressive 240 by 130 degrees of viewable area.

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According to X10, the base and camera can be mounted outside, provided it is in a sheltered area. X10 suggests mounting the Ninja on a front porch, where it can offer a view of the front door, driveway and front yard of a house.

However, In sub-zero temperatures the Ninja's movements became jerky.

Connecting to a TV (up to 100 ft away) is as simple as plugging in the included power supplies for the mount and the signal receiver, plugging the RCA cable into an available AV jack, and aiming the antennas at each other.

Setting up the camera and mount to work with a PC is understandably a little more involved. However, once accomplished, users get more options like taking and e-mailing still images, starting a server to be viewed remotely and adjusting colour balance, hue, brightness / contrast etc.

Once X10 receives an order, they send a link so that users can download all the necessary drivers and programs, as specified in the rather minimalistic supporting documentation and instruction [manuals](#).

How it fared

When the camera and receiver were over about 60 feet apart, some distortion occurred at a few points in the cameras motion, and the picture disappeared completely at one other. I found it was just a matter of fine-tuning the antennas direction so that the important areas were covered.

The positions where the signal became distorted were so few as to be negligible to the overall performance.

The Ninja base's motion is very smooth, and almost silent. It takes about 15 seconds to pan through 180 degrees, and about 10 to tilt through 70.

The included Pan and Tilt remote can control the Ninja mount from up to 100 ft away, and available [Pan and Tilt](#) software for your PC, which goes for \$99.99 US with a USB transceiver, can do the same.

With a video to USB converter and Xray Vision software, the Xcam can be monitored over the Internet, and can function as a wireless Web cam, so users can check on their homes while at work or out of town.

Friends and family can also log on with a free download of Xray Vision Remote



(provided you give them your IP address or user code and password) and view the images from your Xcam.

The picture the camera provides is very clear in good light conditions. Especially considering its size. However, the included protective cap for outdoor use increases ghosting and lens flare when a bright light source is in the frame, but the picture is still viewable.

In low light, the picture becomes grainy, but the Xcam can function better in lower light conditions than other mini cameras I've seen.

So what do you do with it?

X10 suggests home security, monitoring children and Web cam functions as the Xcam and Ninja mount's primary uses, and while it is a definite asset to be able to monitor your home, they forget perhaps the most important thing about having a remote control pan and tilt camera at your disposal... it's fun.

I placed the Ninja mount on top of my television when some friends came over, and everyone was fascinated by it.

Focusing on a key point in the room, like an aquarium, artwork, lava lamp or similar, adds an interesting dimension to a get together, creates an cool conversation piece and a focal point.

Panning around the room, giving colour commentary of what's going on is also fun. Talk of a reality TV show naturally follows.

Product prices as tested (all prices in US dollars)

- \$99.99 ? Ninja Pro mount with remote control
- \$69.99 ? Wide-view Xcam
- \$49.99 ? Pan Tilt Pro software with USB tranceiver
- \$59.99 ? Xray Vision software with video ? USB converter

\$279.96 (approx \$443.81 CDN)

This price is for all components, if bought separately. X10 offers a rotating