

plugging the video receiver into the PC (using a USB conversion plug), plugging in the RF PC transceiver to another USB port and then firing up the software. Now you can not only see the video, but also tell the motorized base to move as well.

X10 makes a number of different software programs to use and they all work with Windows 95/98/ME/2000—and the PC doesn't have to be super-modern either (just 200Mhz or greater capabilities). For example, the X-ray software snaps still images at predetermined times and is able to transfer them over the Internet on command, while the new Virtual Ninja ScanPad works exclusively with the Ninja configuration to provide viewing and control of streaming video from over the Internet (providing that the computer is on, and that there is a "live" connection online). That's no problem since we have an always-on cable modem at our house, but this can also work with a dial-up modem.

So we hooked up the video camera, made the various receiver connections to our PC, ran the ScanPad software and were watching the feed from the other room after less than a half-hour's set-up time. We tried this out from a friend's computer next door who also has broadband, and it did indeed work—the video was a bit jerkier here since it was showing streaming video (of course we had to install the corresponding software on his PC first and enable the security options since it just doesn't allow anyone to "tune in" uninvited).

But security means more than just video, and X10 has a wide assortment of modules that can interact with the camera and software for protecting the home. These include motion detectors, heat sensors, as well as sensors attaching to doors and windows to note when they're being opened. The way this works is that these modules use the A/C line to not only power themselves, but also transmit commands. So they're able to notify a "control" when something happens, and in response they can be told to do something—for example, a motion or heat detector telling a lighting module to turn on the lamp it's attached to and turn on a video camera or start a VCR recording. Since master modules are able to receive RF signals (besides using the phone lines) and then activate others, this creates a very effective, non-invasive method for building a security system in an apartment or even dorm room (my 14-year-old nephew said he wanted one for his room). We tried out the motion detector by tossing a ball into its "sight" and it activated a chime we had configured and plugged into the wall socket in the bathroom (wouldn't want to be caught with our pants down, would we?).

So while X10 may disturb you online, their products will make up for it by keeping you from being disturbed in the real world.

Xanboo

Xanboo's technology may seem pretty pedestrian at a glance—after all, having wired video cameras going into a PC (letting you see what is being viewed) doesn't sound so amazing in light of today's technology. Nor does the fact that it's inexpensively priced seem end of a "hook" by itself. But Xanboo is designed to integrate with the Internet, so that you can view whatever those cameras online—whether you're down the block or thousands of miles away. And additional modules for lighting and appliances can be added to it into an automated home network.

The basic starter kit (\$49.95) has a compact color video camera (containing a built-in motion detector) which plugs into a system controller, then is attached to a PC. Optional devices include door/window sensors, an acoustic sensor, temperature sensor, thermostat and water sensor. While the camera uses a very long cable, these sensors communicate wirelessly with the system controller and can be very useful. They go beyond just warning of a door or window being intruded upon; for example, the water sensor could have warned a cousin that his water heater had developed a leak and flooded the basement.

Now you'd say how could he have been warned? As it turns out, Xanboo enables the sensors to "talk" to the operating system, which in turn can send you messages and warnings via automated e-mail, or a text message to your cell phone or pager.

But there is a catch. To properly manage all the technology online, Xanboo requires you to use their online service, which entails a monthly service charge. This costs a few dollars a month though and the month's service is included free with purchase of any starter system.

Here's a quick rundown of what you can do from the Xanboo Web site, which can be accessed by a Web browser online: **Video-** watch video in real time; see



Above: X-10's Ninja Cam on its motorized pan and tilt base.

Below: X-10's Pan and Tilt Pro software for controlling and viewing security video.

stamped video stills; see 10-second video clips recorded automatically. We tried contacting our video camera from a laptop at a friend's, and were able to see all of the video functions. **On/Off sensor-** detects power interruption of any appliance (like a refrigerator it's attached to) and sends you a warning. **Temperature sensor (and external temperature probe)-** monitors and sends periodic reports of the ambient temperature. **Thermostat sensor-** Internet-enabled to let you set up schedules remotely as well as control the usage in real time. **Door sensor-** monitors audio and sends an alert if sound is above a set decibel level (such as a doorbell ringing or window being smashed in). **Door/window sensor-** sends message if door/window is opened.