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Here comes home control

New IP services help mobile and remote workers monitor the home while away.

By [Toni Kistner](#)
Network World, 08/04/03

Forget The Clapper and Bill Gates' house. The first wave of Internet-enabled home-control and monitoring services are in sight, and they're reasonably priced, stable and truly useful.

Such services can ease a variety of problems brought on by remote and mobile work styles, and improve the security of the corporate home office. Mobile workers who spend lengthy periods on the road can set up lighting routines to make the house look active, remotely monitor security cameras, control thermostats to conserve energy and monitor the water heater in winter to ensure the pipes don't freeze.

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was picked up on schedule.

The market had a false start around 2000 when Xanboo and BeAtHome launched monitoring services. Xanboo no longer sells products in retail, and BeAtHome was

Remote workers who live in residential areas can beef up security with a camera at the front door they can monitor from within the home office, and motion detectors at the office windows. And employees who struggle to balance work and family responsibilities can use live cameras to ensure the children come home from school, that the cleaning lady came as promised or a package

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acquired by Echelon, the leading player in industrial remote network monitoring. Big players such as GE, IBM, Microsoft and Sears also are exploring home-control technologies.

But today, two new companies to watch are [Connected Hearth](#) and [SecurityBroadband](#). Connected Hearth offers a combination of security and home control services; SecurityBroadband focuses on security but plans to offer control services as customers demand. Both companies build their service around a gateway device that connects to the broadband modem over Ethernet. The gateway connects to the controlled devices using wires, X-10 power-line technology, radio frequency and eventually 802.11. Neither service requires a dedicated PC, a drawback of earlier offerings. Vicar Networks sells such a Windows-PC based system and announced in April it had struck a deal with an unnamed service provider to launch a market trial.

John Thorsen, co-founder of Connected Hearth, had commuted from his home in New York City to a weekend home in the Hamptons for years. Before he'd return to the city Sunday night, Thorsen would turn down the thermostat to 50 degrees and shut off the water heater. But every Friday night when he pulled into the driveway, a sense of dread would come over him: Had the house been broken into? Had the heater's pilot light gone out or the pipes burst? Even if nothing had happened, it would take hours for the house to warm up. When he couldn't find a remote monitoring service to meet his needs, the former AppleScript software developer and trainer launched Connected Hearth.

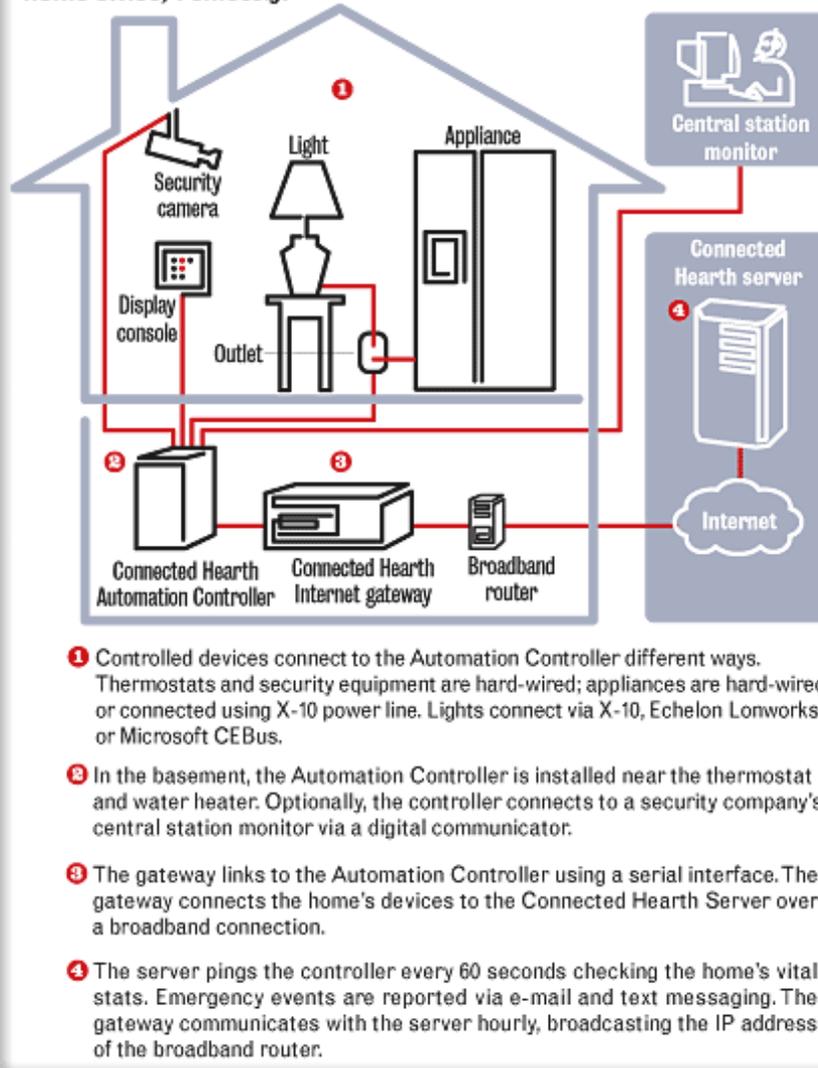
Today, Connected Hearth service is available in the Hamptons, where homes average \$1.7 million. The basic service, which costs \$6,000, includes a home automation controller, Internet gateway box, cameras, motion detectors and sensors. Monitoring costs \$60 a month. The company plans to expand its service nationally by September with partner Home Automation.

SecurityBroadband's Safe Village System offers intercoms and video cameras that provide live IP feeds and recorded video at 15-second intervals. The set up includes an alarm panel type of gateway device, indoor camera with motion detector, two window or door sensors, two intercom stations, keypad and siren. The base package costs \$499, with monthly monitoring for \$40. An outside camera is also available. The company, launched in 1999 by former cable executives, has rolled out service to some Cox Communications and Comcast customers in Sarasota, Fla., and Las Vegas, with plans to expand service soon.

Both companies offer password-protected access to the Web site, where users can monitor activity and change settings. The companies can't access customers' Web pages, and SecurityBroadband offers a guest user account that can be configured with an expiration date, should a subscriber want to turn over monitoring control to someone else in their absence. If anything goes awry, the companies contact the homeowner via phone, and Connected Hearth also sends a text-message notification.

Controlling forces

Connected Hearth's new service offers IP-based device monitoring and control, so you can watch over and maintain your home (and home office) remotely.



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