



Dropcam

By Russ McGuire - russ.mcguire@gmail.com

Last month Nest, the connected home company acquired by Google for \$3.2 billion, announced it was acquiring Dropcam. The reported price of the home monitoring company is \$555 million. Apparently, Google sees value in people installing video streaming cameras in their homes. Is there an opportunity for such devices in our churches? Or are there dangers that should give us pause?

What is Dropcam?

Dropcam is a startup technology company based in San Francisco. Their website tells the story of how they got started. One of the founders' fathers was trying to figure out which neighbor's dog was getting into his yard. The son decided to invent a solution. But investors weren't interested in another video camera company. So they repositioned as a "cloud video" company, and raised money from top tier venture capitalists.

The company sells a WiFi connected video camera that can mount in flexible ways around the house. Since the camera is always connected, you can peek in on your home anytime from anywhere using mobile and web apps. You can even have a two-way voice conversation with anyone near the camera. You can get notifications of motion or sound when there shouldn't be either, so the camera doubles as a security monitoring system. You can sign up for optional cloud video storage so you

can see what happened when you weren't watching. You can also choose to share your video stream with friends, or make it public for the whole world to see.

Dropcam also markets their product for businesses, with all of the same features, for security and sharing with customers.

What is Nest?

Nest is a startup technology company based in Silicon Valley. Their first product was a WiFi connected thermostat for homes that adapts to your lifestyle. Their second product was a WiFi connected smoke detector. The company describes themselves this way: "Nest reinvents unloved but important home products, like the thermostat and smoke alarm. The company focuses on delighting customers with simple, beautiful and thoughtful hardware, software and services." In January, Google announced they were acquiring Nest for \$3.2 billion.

It appears that Google was motivated by its desire to be a major player in the "Internet of Things" (IoT). As everyday items (like thermostats and smoke detectors) become wirelessly connected, the ways in which we interact with them change, and the way in which their value is realized is re-defined. Nest has proven that they understand this and can deliver quality products that make it happen. Nest's CEO and co-founder, Tony Fadell, is best known as the designer of the iPod when he was an Apple employee, and we know the impact that the iPod has had on how we interact with music and the revolutionary impact it has had on the music industry. Google is betting on Nest's team to have a similar impact on many other product categories.



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How could Dropcam help churches and ministries?

Dropcam's topline marketing message for their products is "Super Simple Security." Most of the applications they talk about on their website are security-related uses. Clearly, with a price starting at \$149, Dropcam is an affordable solution for securing critical areas of your facility.

For a small church building, a single Dropcam with alerts set for motion and sound could replace an elaborate monitored security system. For larger ministries, having Dropcams in your Chil-

dren's ministry wing, along with video storage, can provide peace of mind to parents and a strong deterrent to vile sin. Even those that don't believe or fear Proverbs 15:3 ("The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.") will likely fear human prosecution.

Theoretically, Dropcam could even provide live streaming of your church service to "visitors" around the world.

What is dangerous about Dropcam?

Dropcam has taken many steps to address obvious concerns with streaming live video from your home or ministry, but these concerns are still worth considering.

The biggest concern is that the wrong people will watch your video stream. In 2010, a high profile court case featured a school system that allegedly spied on students by secretly turning on the webcams in their school-issued laptops. This case helped make us all aware of how creepy and scary it was that someone might be watching us through the webcams in our computers. But, a criminal doesn't need to own a laptop (as the school system did) to be able to tap into its webcam, as exploits posted on the web demonstrate. These stories should make us all nervous. A small piece of tape over your webcam lens isn't a bad idea if you even slightly value your privacy.

I haven't come across any reports of unauthorized users tapping into Dropcam video streams. The company gives the owner of the camera the ability to control who can legitimately watch video streams and sets the default to private (meaning only the owner can see). The camera can also be set to automatically turn itself off when the owner is nearby - making it easy to monitor your prop-

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erty while you're away while not worrying about generating video streams when you are there.

On their website, Dropcam also says "Dropcam uses bank-level security to ensure that your live and stored video are safe, even on open wireless networks. Your video is encrypted on the camera before it is transmitted to the cloud and streamed securely to your devices using SSL encryption."

The second concern is that Dropcam could let its new owner's owner (Google) use data from your camera for a variety of "big data analytics" purposes, including fine tuning the ads that get presented to you across the Internet. Even without access video streams, Google could determine what hours you are home (or your facility is in use), how much activity there is in the building, and who you authorize to access your video streams.

These same concerns arose when Google bought Nest. Dropcam has said that they will adopt Nest's privacy policy upon completion of the deal. In a FAQ about their acquisition by Google, Nest CEO Fadell wrote "Our privacy policy clearly limits the use of customer information to providing and improving Nest's products and services. We've always taken privacy seriously and this will not change." However, "providing and improving" is pretty broad language, and what Google considers an "improvement" may not match your definition.

It is my hope and prayer that these articles on the power and danger of technology will encourage you in your daily walk with Christ. Whether it is the printing press, radio, television, personal computers, the Internet, the Cloud, smartphones, or security cameras, new technologies continue to advance our ability to know God and to serve Him, wherever we go. As 1 Peter 4:10 teaches us "As each has

received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is CXfriends (<https://cxfriends.com>), a social network for Christian families.



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