

Up Close: Dropcam Brings IP Video to Android

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The live video feed of myself shows my winter pallor and the perpetual hat hair typical to most Wisconsin residents in the middle of January. I'm looking at a live video feed of myself on an advance release of Dropcam's new Android app, which went live today.

The video feed is being routed from an Ethernet-connected IP video camera over a Wi-Fi network to a smartphone equipped with Dropcam's new Android-based app for its IP video technology. Even over the weak Wi-Fi signal at my desk, the feed is fairly smooth, and I wonder about setting up the camera at home so that I can watch my pets while I'm away.

Dropcam makes it easy to view live video streams from its Ethernet-based IP cameras on Macs, PCs and the iPhone. As of today, the company's app is now available on Android 2.2 Froyo devices, including the Nexus One, Samsung Vibrant, Motorola Droid, Motorola Droid X, HTC Droid Incredible and HTC Evo. Users can access the service through Wi-Fi or cellular connections.

Similar systems have been on the market before, but they've proven to be frustratingly complex for the average consumer. Dropcam's technology provides users with a seamless way to set up IP cameras and view live video feed from their computer or smartphone.

Dropcam co-founder and CEO Greg Duffy says he and Aamir Virani, the other founder of the company, decided to start Dropcam after seeing how difficult it was for even tech gurus to set up an IP video system with streaming and recording capabilities. Duffy and Virani, both engineers with San Francisco-based Xobni, thought the problem could be fixed with solid back-end software and launched Dropcam in 2009.

"We tried to make the set-up process really easy – easy to stream and record, with sharing pictures, the DVR and the live view of the camera," Duffy says. The company launched its iPhone app last year and plans to expand from its new Android app into other operating systems such as BlackBerry and Windows Phone 7.

Dropcam has equipped its service with a number of bells and whistles, including a cloud-based DVR service that records video streams for up to 30 days so users can review them at a their leisure, and motion and audio detection to alert users of activity recorded by the camera.

At \$199 for the Dropcam Original IP camera and \$279 for the Dropcam Echo, the company's cameras aren't cheap. However, they're H.264 video encoded, making them exponentially more bandwidth efficient than USB webcams, and Dropcam's live video streaming service is free.

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Dropcam's DVR plans that allow users to record, replay and download video cost \$8.95 for a week of recording or \$24.95 for a month of recording. Users can have multiple cameras on one account and share their feeds with friends and family, allowing them to monitor multiple locations at the same time.

For people who want to be able to see and record what's happening at home but lack the technical expertise to set up their own IP video system, Dropcam's cross-platform system is probably worth the investment.

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