

New RCN service offers Net-connected surveillance Video cameras can keep tabs on homes, businesses

By Peter J. Howe, Globe Staff | January 27, 2005

[RCN Corp.](#) is rolling out a broadband service that will let parents and business owners -- and people who obsess about whether they turned the stove off -- use Internet-connected cameras to keep tabs on their homes and companies.

Called WebWatch, the \$10-a-month service is being launched today in five Boston neighborhoods and 15 suburbs where RCN provides cable and telecommunications services. RCN plans to expand it to other US markets later this year.

The service lets subscribers install up to four cameras in their homes or business locations. Through a password-controlled Web page, subscribers can pull up a live view through the cameras on any Internet-connected computer. Or they can set the cameras to begin recording only when a motion detector is tripped and store the recorded video to play back when they log in to the Web page.

The WebWatch service represents the latest of several moves by broadband Internet service providers including RCN, [Comcast Corp.](#), and others to add new services that can take advantage of fast Internet connections and potentially persuade new subscribers to join the 30 million Americans who already have broadband.

As it prepares to emerge from bankruptcy protection after piling up billions in debt building out networks to challenge cable and phone companies, RCN is also looking for new revenue streams.

Last summer, RCN launched a new subscription music service offering unlimited access to 700,000 songs for \$8 a month. Comcast, the dominant New England cable provider with franchises in more than 350 cities and towns, later this year plans to enhance an existing "video mail" service that lets people record and send short clips of themselves to friends and family with a full home videoconferencing service that runs through high-speed lines.

"In RCN, you have a company that has a network that is now the most modern, high-capacity pipe out there, and they're putting their thinking cap on and saying: What can we do to maximize this asset?" said Chris Roberts, a financial analyst with Tejas Securities Group Inc. in Austin, Texas, who follows the Princeton, N.J., company.

[Verizon Communications](#) Inc. this year will deploy a powerful new fiber-optic network to more than 200,000 Massachusetts homes and businesses, and parts of nine other states, that can offer cable television and other advanced services.

Comcast spokeswoman Jeanne Russo said based on customer demand, the cable giant has no near-term plans to roll out a WebWatch-style service.

"We are focusing on what our customers tell us they want, and the six key areas are music, movies, sports, kids, gaming, and communications," Russo said.

One of RCN's marketing pitches for the WebWatch service is that it will send technicians to subscribers' homes to install the cameras and activate the service. The \$10 monthly fee covers one camera free; subscribers who want more than one camera have to buy them on their own. Set-up fees will vary, but RCN expects to offer frequent promotions that make installation free, company executives said.

A handful of similar services have begun to hit the mass consumer market recently. [Motorola Inc.](#) last summer began selling a broadband home monitoring system, which starts at about \$220 for a device with a single camera and can be expanded with heat, flood, and motion sensors.

A California company, Perseus Wireless, also last year launched a system that allows monitoring of home security cameras through high-end cellphones, usually costing upwards of \$2,000.

Elad Nafshi, RCN's director of Internet and phone product management, said in contrast to the Motorola system, which requires users to keep their computers on, the RCN service operates directly through a wireless router provided by the company.

"None of this is proprietary equipment" but takes advantage of off-the-shelf WiFi home wireless networking technology, Nafshi said.

For now, the service does not include audio, but Nafshi said that is one of several enhancements RCN plans to WebWatch in coming months.

In Massachusetts, RCN serves the Boston neighborhoods of Allston, Brighton, Hyde Park, Roslindale, and West Roxbury; and Arlington, Brookline, Burlington, Dedham, Framingham, Lexington, Natick, Needham, Newton, Somerville, Stoneham, Wakefield, Waltham, Watertown, and Woburn. Its network reaches more than 270,000 homes in Greater Boston.

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