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Electronics geared to fears may hit home at trade show

By Jonathan Sidener
STAFF WRITER

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Someone out there thinks you're nervous, maybe even paranoid.

They hope that concern about things that go bump in the night will have you lusting for military-grade night-vision cameras to guard your home.

They're sure the fear that Fido, Grandpa or little Jimmy will slip out the back gate and wander off has you primed to buy a clip-on GPS tracking device.

And they have no doubt that the October wildfires had you wishing for a fireproof external hard drive for your computer.

Whether worry will lead consumers to purchase high-tech protection remains to be seen. But when the annual Consumer Electronics Show opens tomorrow in Las Vegas, there will be markedly more security products among the usual displays of high-definition TVs and wireless routers.

The four-day trade show for the \$155 billion consumer electronics industry expects 140,000 attendees and 2,700 electronics manufacturers.

Thousands of products and prototypes debut at the show each year. A few, such as HDTV, become blockbusters. Some enjoy moderate success. Many never make it to mass production.

FLIR Systems, a military and corporate security company based in Oregon, will be at the expo to debunk the idea that night-vision technology, developed for the military and law enforcement, is out of the reach of homeowners. The cameras FLIR will be displaying have dropped into the \$2,500 range.

"Three years ago, these were

HIGH-TECH SECURITY PRODUCTS

Thousands of new products and prototypes debut at the annual Consumer Electronics Show, which opens tomorrow in Las Vegas. This year's expo will see more security products, such as these:



The SentrySafe Fire-Safe

The heat and water-resistant safe contains an external hard drive and room for paper records and CD or DVD data.



The PocketFinder

The waterproof, shock resistant tracking device, shown in prototype,



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La Jolla Marriott Hotel 9100 Camino del Rio East Thursday, January 22 10:00 am - 12:45 pm	Coronado Island Marriott 3000 Coronado Drive Wednesday, January 23 10:00 am - 12:45 pm	Point Loma Executive Conference Center 3800 La Jolla Village Drive Thursday, January 24 10:00 am - 12:45 pm	Hilton Mission Valley 901 Camino del Rio South Wednesday, January 30 10:00 am - 12:45 pm	Hilton Mission Valley 901 Camino del Rio South Wednesday, January 30 6:00 pm - 8:45 pm

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- Understanding Medicare and Long Term Care
- Avoiding Every Trap

More information including dates and locations will be given at the 7 Biggest Mistakes workshop.

A \$990 attendance fee will be charged to all stockholders, insurance agents and legal professionals.

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\$15,000 cameras that we sold to airports and other facilities with special security needs," said FLIR spokesman Bill Klink.

Lately, he said, the company has been looking for new markets, initially targeting smaller businesses such as marinas that want security without being lit up like used-car lots.

"We've been surprised by the amount of interest in residential security," Klink said. "Mostly it's been higher-end residential."

The cameras produce a black-and-white image of people and buildings. Technically known as thermal-imaging cameras, they produce images in daylight as well as in the dark.

In a video on the company's Web site, flir.com, a figure walking across a street is clearly seen to be a man, though facial features, skin color and other details cannot be discerned.

Klink said that lack of detail is sometimes an advantage. The company sold thermal-imaging cameras to a celebrity who wanted security and privacy but not cutting-edge pictures.

"He didn't want video from his security system turning up on the Internet," Klink said.

The movement of electronics companies into the home security market is supply-driven more than demand-driven, said Mike Paxton, an analyst with Arizona-based market research firm In-Stat.

"I don't think consumers feel less secure than they did two years ago," Paxton said. "During the last six months, we've seen an emerging trend of corporate security vendors pushing their products toward consumers."

Paxton said it's too soon to know whether industrial security companies will be successful in the consumer marketplace.

San Diego resident Glenn Busch agrees that the current crop of security gadgets probably reflects falling prices of technology. But he said changes in society's comfort level also are in play.

Busch is head of investor relations for Location Based Technologies of Anaheim, which will introduce a small tracking device at the expo that can be clipped onto a child's coat or a pet's collar.

"I think it's a combination of the technology and the times we live in," Busch said. "When I was growing up, we would ride around on our bikes all day and I'd go home when my mother rang a bell. Today, with two-career families, parents want to know where their children are at all times."

Busch said recent independent research suggested that 44 percent of parents would pay for a location service for their children.

The company's PocketFinder products also can be placed in a car to alert parents if a young driver is going faster than 65 mph.

The system works with a combination of Global Positioning System technology and GSM cell phone networks. The company, which is beginning production of its PocketFinder products, has not yet disclosed the price for the service.

There are competing services that use cell phones to track children, while others use built-in hardware in cars. But the PocketFinder doesn't require a cell phone contract or installation, Busch said.

"There are 38 million kids in America between the ages of 5 and 11 who can't carry a cell phone because they'll drop or lose it. And there are a lot

can be clipped onto a child's coat or a pet's collar. PocketFinder products also can be placed in a car to alert parents if a young driver is going faster than 65 mph.



more pets than that.”

One company will be bringing a long-standing product – updated for the digital age – to the Las Vegas expo. For 70 years, the Sentry Group has been in the business of making fire-resistant safes to keep valuables and business records out of harm’s way.

The Rochester, N.Y.-based company is introducing a fire-resistant external hard drive enclosed in a safelike casing. The company also makes a combination safe capable of protecting paper records, DVD data and a built-in hard drive.

The data safes come in 80-gigabyte and 160-gigabyte versions. They will protect contents for 30 minutes at temperatures of 1,500 degrees, said Sentry Group spokeswoman Sondra McFarlane.

Americans’ anxiety levels might not have changed as much as their lifestyles, she said.

“What’s changed is that digital data has become more and more important to people,” McFarlane said. “We decided to partner with (hard-drive manufacturer) Maxtor Corp. to encase their hard drives in our proprietary technology.”

No list of modern worries would be complete without Internet hackers. As Americans transition to a more Internet-centered lifestyle – shopping and banking online – they are putting more personal information on computers and sending it over connections that might not be secure.

The use of more laptops, often in public Wi-Fi hot spots, carries new risks as well, said Shlomo Touboul, chief executive of Israel’s Yoggie Security Systems.

The company’s Pico device was designed to provide road warriors with the same level of security they have when behind their corporate firewall.

Pico is a Linux computer built into a USB thumb drive. It runs below the Windows operating system on a computer, which means information from the Internet runs through Pico before it gets passed through to Windows.

It also means an attempted attack would detect the Pico, a Linux computer, but not the more-vulnerable Windows system hidden behind the tiny firewall computer.

Pico runs 13 security programs to analyze Internet data, using its own processor so it does not tie up the main computer’s resources. Once scanned by Pico, information from the Internet is passed on to the Windows system.

Not everyone will be the target of a burglar or a kidnapper. Violent crimes in the United States fell slightly from 2000 to 2006, while property crimes stayed about the same for the period.

But anyone who goes online can expect attempted attacks. “On the Internet,” Touboul said, “you know it’s probable.”

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