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Show up - even if you're working from home



By Mark Beard

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WEBCAMS

Maybe you are one of the lucky ones parlaying the high price of gasoline into a work-at-home gig.

Just don't kid yourself: You're going to have show the boss you do more than pad around in your PJs all day.

Answering the phone is a big step. Nothing fills a supervisor's head with visions of you sunning on the back porch more than a string of unanswered calls and e-mails.

And nothing beats a picture of you at your desk, via webcam. (Be sure to leave that beer hat out of the frame.)

The new Macally IceCam 2 is one dirt-cheap way to make your presence known.

The USB cam, for both Macs and PCs, costs about \$30.

You can capture video at up to 30 frames per second, at resolutions up to 640x480.

You can clip the cam to the top of your laptop and tilt the thing just enough to mask your 5 o'clock shadow and sleep drool.

Macally says the IceCam will work immediately with your Skype and iChat video chat clients and with a bunch of others.

Also (I'm not clever enough to do this myself), you might try recording yourself at your desk, like a certain go-getter in Sector 7-G and play that while you are raiding the fridge downstairs.

performance gear

Here's a better monitor for budding rock gods

Did your teenager's music teacher order you to encourage the kid's talents this summer? Since there is no way do that quietly, you might as well do it right.

You can always start small. A bass guitar will set you back a bit, but baby's first powered monitor (that is, the speaker he will need to plug into) should not. KRK's Rokit Generation 2 Series Monitors (krksys.com) start at just \$150.

KRK says the Rokit's curved shape eliminates the noise distortion caused by rectangular speaker boxes. To you, it will all sound the same. But if your kid has a gift, he might hear a difference in the Gen 2 monitors.

internet radio

Picking a box to open Pandora (radio that is)

The Internet saved radio from itself. There are now tens of thousands of live streams of music and talk out there, enough to spoil any audiophile who switches on a PC.

But Internet radio stations, even the blessedly commercial-free ones, still choose your music for you.

Even if your favorite station plays lots of vintage Sabbath tunes, for example, you must endure those cheesy Val Halen and Dio anthems that pop up between them.

And that is where the brilliant music-discovery system Pandora (pandora.com), comes in. The website quickly builds a personal station from a single starting point: a favorite song that you select.

Pandora then automatically selects songs with similar characteristics to those you've given the thumbs-up.

Pandora is also available on some music phones, but around the home or office, the service typically keeps listeners tied to their PCs.

My buddy Kathy, a technology buff with great taste, turned me onto Pandora after she got hooked on the service last week, while cleaning out out her elementary school classroom in Boston. We both listen to the service on our computers.

Pandora is a joy to explore on the PC - if you have decent speakers on your desk, that is.

The service is fully integrated only with a handful of Internet radios. One of those, a tabletop model from Grace Digital Audio, never worked for me. Another, the Sonos Digital Music System, which I told you about recently, is too pricey for most.

Your best bet for a Pandora-compatible box is the Squeezebox from Logitech, which starts at about \$300 and has a straightforward input panel for integrating the system with your stereo. The Squeezebox also has a fairly large display screen and comes with a remote control, two features absent from other WiFi Internet radios in its price range. ■

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