

Review: Nest's new products offer pricey protection

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As I've noted before, I have a decidedly dumb home. But lately I've been testing out some products from Nest that promise to make it a bit smarter - and safer.

The Google-owned company recently updated all three of the products in

its lineup - its thermostat, connected security camera and smart smoke detector. I've been using just the latter two, because the ventilation system in my house is so ancient it would be ridiculous to connect it to the thermostat.

I've been impressed with both devices, although I'm much more sold on the Protect smoke detector than the camera.

At base, both devices do relatively simple things. The Protect warns you if it senses fire or smoke. The Cam transmits video and records video when it senses motion.

What makes the gadgets cool and interesting are the ways they go about those tasks and the extra things they can do when they're tied to other gadgets.

The Protect, for example, has two levels of alerts. If it detects a whiff of smoke in your house, it will give a couple of beeps and a spoken warning, and a ring around its center will glow yellow. If it senses a more imminent danger, it will emit a sharp peal and its ring will glow red. In both cases, the device will send an alert to your smartphone, warning you if you've been away from the house.

If you have more than one Protect in the house, the devices will tell you where they sense the problem. And in the case of a false alarm, users can silence the device by pressing a button on the Nest app.

If you have a Nest Cam, it will automatically record video when the Protect goes off, allowing users who are out to check in and see what's going on. If you have a Nest Thermostat, it can be set to shut off your furnace in the case of a fire.

You can get it to work with non-Nest devices, too. If you have Philips

Hue smart light bulbs, you can have them flash red in the case of an alarm as an added alert.

That all sounds great, but I liked some of Protect's more basic features. It will warn you when its battery is running low. And it checks itself every night to make sure everything is functioning properly. That's reassuring, because I struggle to remember to check my old, unconnected smoke alarms even once a month.

The Protect's main drawback is its price. Nest is charging \$100 for each one, making it pretty pricey to outfit an entire house. You can find other connected smoke detectors for between \$30 and \$50.

The Nest Cam has fewer pluses and more minuses.

Among the things I liked was that it shoots and streams sharp, high-definition, 1080p video; many of its rivals shoot in lower resolution 720p or even in standard definition. It also has good night-vision capabilities.

Compared with other connected cameras I've used, the Nest Cam does a better job of distinguishing between the movements of people and animals and the swaying of plants or other inanimate objects. Other cameras I've used tend to record a lot of useless video, but this one targets real movement. You can potentially reduce false alarms further by setting zones for the camera to focus on, something easily done through Nest's website.

Another cool - and somewhat creepy - feature is that the Cam has a built-in speaker and mic that allow you to use it as a kind of intercom. When you press a button in the Nest app, you can talk to people through the Cam.

In addition to recording video when the Protect senses smoke, it can also

turn on when the Nest Thermostat is in Away mode and turn off when the Thermostat is switched to Home.

But that's about it for connecting the Cam to other devices. And it has some notable shortcomings.

The Cam isn't made for outdoor use and Nest isn't offering a protective case, so you can't use it to keep an eye on the outside of your home. Although it connects to the Internet wirelessly, it has a cord that has to be plugged into a regular power outlet. Not only can the cord be unsightly, it limits where you can place the Cam.

And the device is just plain expensive to buy and use. Nest charges \$200 per camera. But it stores video on Nest's servers, rather than on a memory card, and in order to view those recorded videos, you have to sign up for a subscription from Nest. That will cost you \$100 a year to store up to 10 days worth of videos from just one camera. Each camera after that will cost you an additional \$50 a year for 10 days of video storage.

By contrast, you can buy two of Netgear's Arlo cameras, which are battery powered and can be used indoors or out, for \$350. Netgear allows users to store up to seven days worth of video from up to five cameras for free.

So, in my attempt to make my home smarter and safer, I think I'll pass on the Nest Cams. But I'm tempted to get a passel of Protects.

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What: Nest Cam

Likes: Sharp 1080p video; does a good job discerning moving people

and animals from swaying plants; versatile stand allows placement in range of places; can be set to automatically turn on when Nest Thermostat is set to Away mode; ability to be used like an intercom.

Dislikes: Pricey, particularly with cloud storage service; few interactions with other smart-home devices; not made for outdoor use; power cord limits placement.

Price: \$200. Nest Aware services costs \$100 a year for 10 days worth of [video](#) storage for first camera, \$300 for 30 days storage. Storage for each additional camera costs \$50 for 10 days and \$150 for 30 days.

Web: nest.com

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