

Arcsoft Simplicam: Sophisticated security done simply

BY MICHAEL ANSALDO



ARCSOFT IS KNOWN for its behind-the-scenes technology that usually ends up on your camera or smartphone; but with the Simplicam (\$150; simplicam.com), the company has stepped into the spotlight. And this unassuming little home surveillance camera is worth your attention.

Powered by Closeli cloud services, the Simplicam offers high performance with extensive customizability and a new facial-recognition feature that makes an easy entrée into the world of DIY home security.

What you get

The Simplicam cuts a fine figure with its gloss-black face and aluminum frame. The camera itself pivots up and down and swivels 360-degrees on its ring-shaped stand, providing a multitude of viewing angles. It also comes with a plastic wall mount and a 10-foot long power cable. It's missing one major feature, though: It doesn't have a back-up battery.

The Simplicam streams 720p live video and has a 107-degree field of view, which is smaller than what's offered by many other cameras in

this price range. At night, it uses a ring of infrared LEDs around the lens to light up dark rooms. It also features two-way audio. The camera can be operated from a web app or the Closeli app for iOS or Android.

The Simplicam offers both motion and sound detection and allows you to calibrate the sensitivity for each so that you're not inundated with alerts every time your dog wags his tail in proximity of the camera.

The camera's differentiator, however, is facial recognition, which should reduce false alerts by helping the camera distinguish between motion made by a human versus a pet or a car passing in front of a window.

Currently in beta, this feature allows you to enter up to 10 people in the app's face-recognition manager. You can then configure privacy settings for each person, such as telling the Simplicam to stop recording or to send you an alert when that person is recognized. The app also provides ways to improve the camera's recognition of each individual as it acquires more video footage of them.

But facial recognition is available only with one of three Closeli



Detection Zone: The Simplicam app lets you adjust sound and motion sensitivity and set motion detection zones.

Roundup: Security Cameras

recording plans, which you'll also need for saving video as the SimpliCam has no onboard storage. For \$5 per month or \$50 per year, you can view the last day's recordings and save up to one hour of clips. You can review the past 11 days of recordings and save up to three hours of clips for \$14 per month or \$140 per year. And \$23 per month or \$230 per year gets you 21 days of recordings and up to 5 hours of clips.

Setup and usage

To set up the SimpliCam, you can either plug it into your computer and run an installer or connect it wirelessly using the smartphone app. I used my iPhone, which required that I log in to the app, add the camera, and enter my Wi-Fi info. The app generated a QR code, which I held in front of the camera until it beeped twice to let me know it had scanned it. Within minutes, the camera was connected to my network, and I was getting a live feed on my phone.

The SimpliCam's video quality was clear, if not exceptionally sharp, and I could easily make out details in both normal and night vision. There was negligible image bending at the edges of the frame, and no distortion even when using the 4x digital zoom to focus on areas of interest.

The Closeli app is one of the SimpliCam's strengths. Your live feed, or feeds if you have multiple cameras set up, appear on the home screen. Tap on the one you want to view, and it opens a feed window with controls to turn off the camera's speaker and microphone, access the facial-recognition manager, and take screen captures of the live feed. The last is particularly handy as you can quickly save visual "evidence" to your phone's

Arcsoft SimpliCam

AT A GLANCE

Its facial recognition needs seasoning, but the SimpliCam's customizable detection features and low cloud-storage fees make it one of the strongest home security cameras available.

PROS

- Excellent app
- Extensive customization options
- Low starting subscription fee

CONS

- Unreliable facial detection
- No battery backup
- Video is stored in the cloud only

\$150



camera roll.

Beneath this is a scrolling timeline that marks events with color-coded bars: yellow for face detection, orange for movement, gray for no events. Tapping a bar takes you to the video record of that event. My man-fingers, however, found it tough to be precise with these thread-thin bars, so I usually opted to press the event icon at the bottom of the screen, which opens a page of all your event clips. You can filter these by motion, sound, or face detection. You can also download or manually delete cloud-stored videos from either the timeline or the events page.



Video playback of these clips is instantaneous and butter-smooth. The audio, while tinny, is clear—in one clip, I could even make out dialog on a downstairs TV recorded while the camera was in an upstairs bedroom.

One of the pitfalls of any Wi-Fi security camera is its tendency to inundate you with alerts any time it detects errant movement. The SimpliCam has a couple of features that help keep it from crying wolf. The first is its notification flexibility. Rather than getting an alert anytime it detects anything—which is the default—the SimpliCam can be configured through the app to send you alert summaries every 10, 30, or 60 minutes. Alternatively, you can schedule alerts to be sent to you at set times.

The second is its ability to calibrate the camera's sound and motion sensitivity and set detection areas. The first two are accomplished by adjusting sliding scales that range from "Bam" to "Whisper," and from "Crash" to "Tiptoe" respectively. The last allows you to designate motion detection areas by tapping squares on a grid overlaid on the

The SimpliCam pivots and swivels on its ring-mount to provide a multitude of viewing angles.

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video. This feature, in particular helped me stanch the fire hose of alerts I was receiving every time my cat wandered into frame of the camera.

As for the SimpliCam's marquee feature, it was fairly successful in detecting faces, but less so in recognizing them. After I added mine to the face recognition manager—which entailed it taking a series of front and profile pictures of me—it usually, but not always, alerted me when I passed in front of the lens. Unfortunately, I had it set to not notify me in those instances. To be fair, the SimpliCam website warns that it can take several weeks to really learn your visage, a luxury it didn't have during my testing.

Bottom line

Aside from the hiccups with its facial recognition—which will likely get smoothed out soon (SimpliCam is soliciting customer feedback to improve it)—the SimpliCam worked as-advertised in my hands-on testing, no small thing in the often-buggy world of security cameras. Its performance, extensive customization options, and cloud-storage subscription fees that start below the usual \$10 per month are plenty to recommend it. 🏠

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