Webcam: Concord, MA; USA

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For anyone interested in the current weather in Concord, Massachusetts, or for anyone just plain bored to tears, I've set up a webcam pointing out my home office window onto the street.

I don't actually work from home during the week, but if I stare hard enough at my monitor at work I might just fool my weary brain into thinking I'm somewhere other than this stale, monochromatic cattle stall they call a cubical.

For those technically inclined, I'm using a Logitech QuickCam Pro 4000. This camera is compatible with and works well from both my my RedHat Linux 8 & 9, and Windows XP machines. I prefer to **not** use the software suite that comes with the camera because of several reasons. First, to use it as a webcam such that it automatically uploads pictures to the web then you would have to sign up for an account on SpotLife. This makes it impossible to have that software upload photos to a private account. Second, that software does not allow you to save photos to a place visible from Windows Explorer, but rather it somehow hides their location and you are forced to use their explorer to view the gallery.

Instead, I much prefer to use the CoffeeCup WebCam 3.5 software. It is fully configurable to upload to the website of your choice via FTP. It has a a schedular such as what I'm using to take 5 photos per hour from 6am to 8pm Eastern Time, or more generally whenever its light outside. If I could, I would take the Motion Sensor activation feature of the Logictech software and put it into CoffeeCup. It would be great if all the webcam photos were of a moment when something was actually happening, but instead we're stuck with whatever happens to be on the street at the scheduled time.

Technical Update 09/11/03: After digging deeper, I found where the Logitech application stores its photos, which I previously thought were somehow obsfucated. Knowing the location of the images on disk enabled me to take advantage of the motion detector capability in the Logitech software and also integrate ColdFusion MX scripts to manage the photo storage and upload processes.

I set the webcam to take a photo when the motion level exceeds about 20% along the slider from the left, where the left is most sensitive and the right is the least. This 20% setting allows vehicles crossing the cameras path to be detected when they are fully in the frame. I had tried a more sensitive level to catch people walking by, but then cars were being captured when only half in the frame.

The webcam is also set to wait 1 minute before taking another photo, and a ColdFusion scheduled task (a Free Developer Edition of ColdFusion MX 6.1 on one of my home computers) checks the photo directory every 90 seconds, and if it finds a new photo then it posts the new photo to my website via CFHTTP. My website has a handler page that accepts a level of authentication along with a new photo, and puts it in the webcam photo collection. That handler page then checks if more than 150 photos exist

in the webcam collection, and removes any older ones. I figure 150 photos at 1.5 minutes apart allows viewing of almost the last 4 hours worth of images. Back on the home computer, there is another ColdFusion scheduled task which runs at night that deletes all the photos that were taken during that day.