

BY STACEY SOLT

homestyle



One-Touch Living

Smart Homes: Affordable, Wireless, Cutting-Edge

As homes continue to grow in both size and complexity, the allure of the “smart” home has interested many homeowners.

Ted Rosenberger, President of HouseLogix, a home automation company based in Allentown, first encountered the inherent challenges of a large house with his custom-built home in Allentown. The spacious, modern home would have made lighting management and energy conservation difficult. “We would have spent half our lives turning lights on and off,” he adds.

Enter the smart home, a term commonly used to describe a fully automated house. One centralized system controls all of the home’s features, from lighting and temperature maintenance to the security system.

“Because I was a high-tech guy, I felt that my home should have a lot of technology,” says Rosenberger. The house features an impressive

display of automation and comfort. To complete the project, installers hid miles of wire within the home’s walls. “It was a big job, but the end results were spectacular.”

Fortunately, advancements in technology have made home automation more affordable and available to a wide range of homeowners. As Rosenberger admits, a lot has changed since he completed his own “smart” home just two years ago.

Why Wireless?

“Up until recently, home automation was limited to the realm of million dollar homes and Hollywood—homes built by very wealthy homeowners,” says Rosenberger.



“One of the things [you] can do is get rid of all your confusing remotes,” says Rosenberger. “You have one remote for the whole house.” Don’t worry about losing it—just page the remote through your wireless system to find its location.



Does a smart home seem a bit too high-tech for you? Most systems can be programmed to be as simple or complex as you desire, virtually eliminating the learning curve you may fear.

all of a home's major systems. Homeowners can choose to automate their entire home, one section of the house, or just one room.

"Suddenly, it has opened up the market from millionaires building new homes to anyone who has the desire to make improvements to their current home," says Rosenberger. "You've now got a reliable way for everything in the house to communicate."

He's not exaggerating when he says "everything," either. Whether you wish to automatically control lights, televisions, music, a heating or cooling system, or even the settings on your outdoor whirlpool or fountain, you can link your favorite applications into a smart home system.

The options are nearly limitless, adds Rosenberger. "Anything that has an on-off switch can be controlled remotely by this next-generation technology."

The Convenience Factor

Bethlehem homeowners Mitch and Carol Rabinowitz were searching for a way to bring their home's many systems together. They wanted a programmable thermostat, additional security

adds, noting that the implications for automated living are virtually limitless. Combining all of the home's systems into one program can be a tremendous time saver, especially for a large home. "It's all about streamlining your life, and not wasting time on things that a machine can easily do."

Many home settings can also be controlled through a secure Web site, an added bonus for second homes and homeowners with a long commute. Turn on the hot water heater and adjust the temperature before leaving for home, and find the house ready to welcome you upon arrival.

Energy Savings

The potential energy savings from one touch living are impressive. As mentioned above, programmable home settings are a large component of home automation. Every system can be programmed for maximum energy and cost efficiency.

Automation technology could only be utilized in new construction homes, because the process of installing wires was too expensive and time-consuming in existing homes. The cost of adding miles of wire and high-tech gadgets to a new home was also extremely expensive. "It was well beyond the reach of most homeowners," he adds.

Within the last two years, however, advancements in technology have allowed compa-

nies to begin offering wireless automation, which removes the need to tear open walls. HouseLogix is the first company in the Valley to focus its business on wireless automation.

The process is surprisingly simple: Replace existing light switches in each room with a special dimmer containing a small, wireless transmitter. Each transmitter can "talk" to the next, spreading a signal throughout the home and creating a wireless network that can control

features, and more control over their indoor and outdoor lights and audio system. "We were thinking of doing these things as separate projects," says Mitch. When he heard about the wireless automation systems now available, he thought it would make sense to tie all of their projects together into one integrated system.

"Everything in our life is automated," says Mitch, noting that the family already relies heavily on computers and technology. "This system ties a lot of things together, and makes things easier for us."

To understand the level of automation and total integration made possible by modern wireless networks, it helps to understand how wireless homes are controlled. Wireless homes by HouseLogix are controlled using several basic tools: wireless touch panels, a universal remote, and "smart" light switches. Each of these tools offers access to the entire home, allowing the homeowner to adjust lighting, temperature, music, and more with the touch of a button.

"Smart" light switches can take several forms: They can function as a normal light switch and dimmer, or be replaced by a keypad with buttons

labeled for use. Remotes and touch panels also incorporate these buttons. For example, one button may say "Away" or "Good-night." When you leave the home, or head off to bed, simply press the appropriate button.

What happens when you press the button? That's up to the homeowner. Maybe you want all of the interior and exterior lights turned off at night, or wish to keep a few hallway and safety lights on for late-night wanderers. "The homeowner is in control," says Rosenberger, noting that the homeowner can easily modify these settings.

But these new wireless automation systems go far beyond turning off the lights. Would you like the hot water heater turned off, and the security system turned on, when you go to bed? Done. Worried about leaving the garage door open overnight? The system will check for you, and close the door when you go to bed.

"I've coined the phrase, 'One touch living,'" he



Arrive in style: program your smart home to make a grand entrance. When the garage door opens, the appropriate lights and music selections turn on.

For an example, let's revisit the "Away" setting in a HouseLogix home.

"The system realizes that the house is not occupied, and it takes appropriate action," says Rosenberger. The hot water heater turns down. The house's temperature adjusts higher or lower, depending on the season. Unnecessary lights turn off on all levels of the home.

"It's simple logic to turn things off before you leave, but busy people just don't have the time to run around and do these things," he says. Attempting to save energy in a larger home can be particularly burdensome, and normal programmable thermostats and water heaters won't work with an erratic schedule.

Wireless automation systems also take the traditional programmable thermostat to a new level, allowing homeowners to cool and warm the house appropriately for sleep and wake cycles. Rosenberger has also outfitted some homes with an outdoor temperature sensor: When the outdoor temperature reaches a comfortable range, perhaps between 68 and 72 degrees, the home's heating and cooling systems stop running to conserve energy.

Security

Homeowners can choose to monitor and control their home from a secure Web site, allowing them to see and react to minor problems before they become a larger issue. Cameras also provide peace of mind for those with vacation homes.

"Nanny cams" allow parents to monitor a babysitter, and outdoor cameras allow homeowners to see guests standing at the front door. Wireless sensors notify homeowners of an approaching car in the driveway.

Smart homes can also be equipped with sensors throughout the house, letting parents know if their children are opening the liquor cabinet—or the gun safe. "It's a useful feature for families with children," says Rosenberger. He has also installed water detectors in flood-prone basements. These sensors simply contact the homeowner through a cell phone, sending a text message, or e-mail to indicate problems.

One popular request among older clients is the emergency contact button. Homeowners can push one button to contact a friend through phone, text, or e-mail, asking for help.

Installation and Customization

The key to any successful home automation system is customization. It is important for

homeowners to work with their installation team, to ensure that their needs and wants are met by the new system.

"We work with the homeowner to understand their lifestyle and daily habits, and also what their concerns are," says Rosenberger. "Ease of use is huge. We want to make the entire house consistent and easy to use."

HouseLogix uses components from Control 4, a company specializing in wireless home automation. After speaking with the homeowner, they propose a system setup that will meet the unique needs of their home and lifestyle. Because the entire system operates wirelessly, it can usually be installed in less than one week.

Rosenberger often sees requests for small projects, such as a home theater or multi-media room, from homeowners wanting to try new automation technology. "Once you've installed one room, you can add additional rooms," he says, noting that the flexibility of a wireless system makes updating and expanding fairly simple. "We can adjust the scope of the project to fit almost any budget."

A basic, one-room home theater, complete with an integrated media system, automated lights and a universal remote, can cost as little as \$1,499. The cost of integrating an entire home varies based on the size of the home and the complexity of the project. A complete wireless automation system, including security, convenience and energy-saving features, can cost between \$5,000 and \$20,000 for an entire home.

Keep in mind that the wireless home incorporates multiple systems, such as security measures, an advanced programmable thermostat, and many cost- and energy-saving measures. "It's less expensive to install just one system," says Rosenberger. "It really does work. People love it."

He notes that while the potential for wireless automation is limited only by the imagination, the system's ultimate purpose is purely practical. "People have conjured up this image of a 'smart' house making your coffee in the morning," he says. "Our solution is more about whole-house control, entertainment, security and energy savings."

In any case, you likely own a programmable coffeemaker now. New wireless technology will simply allow you to enjoy that coffee in your automated home—a home waiting for you with just the right temperature, lighting, and sound each morning. **S**

Sources

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