

Home, smart home

Aiming for complete, remote control

By Amber Barz

It's intriguing to think of controlling almost everything in your home with the push of a button: Turn on home lighting from an airplane seat; turn up the thermostat 30 minutes before you arrive home; have the garage door open automatically as you approach; keep an eye on the babysitter from your office.

Does it all work?

The answer seems to be yes, with one caveat. The key to creating a complete smart home system that is perfect for you and your family is to take your time planning, designing and installing it. Look for a technician who is CEA-CompTIA certified. The certification is completed in partnership between the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) and



the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA), and it represents proficiency in installing, maintaining and troubleshooting any vendor's home-networking equipment.

How much does it cost?

Smart home technology can be as elaborate or as basic as you want it to be. It comes down to what is important to you and how much you want to spend. One builder estimates that his clients spend from

Quick tip

What's right for you?

The point of a smart home technology system is to make your life easier. If your TV remote or smart phone frustrates you (or your spouse), you may want to hold off on installing smart technology throughout your place.

\$10,000 to \$100,000 or more on smart technology, depending on the degree of sophistication. But, if you add smart technology gradually, starting with a basic lighting system, for example, it might only cost a few hundred dollars.

What are the drawbacks?

Unfortunately, all "smart" products do not work with all smart systems and many smart products use their own proprietary apps. This means you could install dozens of home automation gadgets and their associated apps, and then end up confused and frustrated as you try to control them all. More and more companies are getting into the smart home market, including Microsoft, Google and Apple. If you are willing to wait another year or two, prices will likely go down and ease of use will likely go up.

A helping hand for everyone

Smart technology can help people of all ages and abilities remain healthy, safe and independent. It can even benefit pets. Here are a few examples:

- Unlock and/or open doors as a wheelchair approaches.
- Remind someone when it's time for exercise, an appointment or a dose of medication.

- Release a preset amount of food into a pet's bowl at specific times of day.
- Program electronic games so that children can only play for an allotted amount of time.
- Turn on and heat up the shower when an alarm goes off.
- Open the shades at dawn and close them at dusk.



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Shopping smart



A whole system or a starter kit?



BIG PACKAGES

Smart Home System manufacturers, such as X10, ZigBee, and Z-Wave provide the fundamental technology for certain brands of electronic devices and automation systems to be controlled by one centralized network with a goal of providing greater convenience, security and energy savings.

Either hardwired or wirelessly, lighting, electronic locks, security systems, motion detectors, electronic blinds, thermostats, televisions, cameras, sound systems, laptops and smartphones can be accessed and controlled through this network. A computer, hard drive, or even the Cloud can work as a network hub. That network and any devices that are connected to it can be accessed through a remote control, touch pad, smart phone or computer. As with computer software packages, only certain products work with certain systems, so it's necessary to purchase products that work within your chosen system.

SMALL STEPS

If you are not ready to embark on a complete home system, consider easing yourself into the smart home technology with a gadget or two along these lines:

- Philips' **Hue LED lights** screw into regular fixtures. Install the app on your phone or tablet, and then you can turn the lights on or off, brighten or dim them, and/or change their color. A starter pack with three bulbs and a bridge sells for about \$200.
- The **Nest thermostat**, about \$250, comes with integrated Wi-Fi so that you can monitor and schedule your home's temperature from under the covers or inside the car. Nest keeps track of your typical settings and then automatically adjusts the thermostat to maximize efficiency and comfort.