

ONE APP TO RULE THEM ALL

Integrated systems simplify smart-home automation

By Kristin Marand

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>> **The Jetsons had** every conceivable convenience of the modern age; a robot housekeeper, hologram communication, automated everything. The futuristic contraptions of the show's brief run in the 1960s and subsequent revamp in the '80s seemed inconceivable in an age when the Clapper was about as high-tech as real-world home automation systems got, but it seems that future has arrived.

The automated, or smart home, is growing in popularity and the options are constantly expanding. Controlling and combining multiple smart features is easier than ever thanks to applications (apps) that can be downloaded onto just about any smart device like a phone or tablet, even a watch.



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Many of today's show homes feature completely integrated systems incorporated from the planning stages. Lights, thermostats, doors, windows, blinds, locks, home entertainment, security and monitoring systems — just about anything electronic can be automated.

Many individual electronic products come with their own apps. Honeywell and ecobee3 have thermostat apps. For lighting, Phillips offers the wirelessly controlled Hue system, and Belkin's WeMo is a line of smart products ranging from light switches to air purifiers and adapters that can turn just about any home appliance into a smart appliance. Delayed at work? With a WeMo-enabled Crock-Pot you can change the cooking time or activate the warm setting remotely. And GE has introduced a line of wi-fi connected appliances that will send you a text message or email when a dishwasher or laundry cycle ends, or let you preheat the oven on your way home from the grocery store.

In homes with multiple smart features, the easiest way to maximize their potential and use them in concert is to have one app to control everything instead of individual apps to control one feature at a time.

"Everything has an app, and what's very useful is you can control anything from your phone. The challenge is they all work independently, there's no intelligence behind it," says Laurence Rosenberg, president of The Accurate Technology Group.

"So what you can do is take those same devices and run them on a home integration platform; it communicates to all these devices but like a symphony."

Popular platforms currently in use at local companies that specialize in home automation are Control 4, Elan-G! RTI (Remote Technologies Incorporated) and the newly introduced (to Manitoba that is) Lyric.

Having the ability to control your entire house from one app is a luxury of convenience. A platform can program various settings and combinations of settings called "scenes." With an integrated platform and its accompanying app, various scenes can be activated from one button, says Sean Banks, president of K&S Electronics.

"I have a bedtime mode in my house. It shuts off all my TVs, audio video, lights, arms the alarm system, makes sure the doors are locked, makes sure my garage is closed, all in one shot," Banks explains.

Though home automation technology has been in use for more than 15 years, some of the most popular smart features remain audio-video consolidation (goodbye remotes!), lighting and motorized window shades or blinds.

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"Lighting and shades — usually that's the one where if people sell their house and they decide they want to do it again that's the No. 1 thing they want to do again," says Trevor Siepman, manager of Advance Electronics' Advanced Residential Technology (ART) department.

"A lot of the little bells and whistles and a lot of the little things that you can get on the individual apps, it's kind of a novelty and then it wears off pretty quickly. But something that affects your everyday, that's a pretty big advantage," Siepman says.

Companies work with homeowners and builders to install anything from a handful of smart features to a completely integrated home system. Just about everything is customizable — even features which may not be top of mind, including fountains and yard fixtures, sprinklers and irrigation, pool pumps, heaters and even plumbing.

On the security front, widely available apps such as Ring.com and Alarm.com allow homeowners to respond to unexpected visitors even when they're not home. Using a smartphone, they can see who's at the door and speak to them from a remote location.

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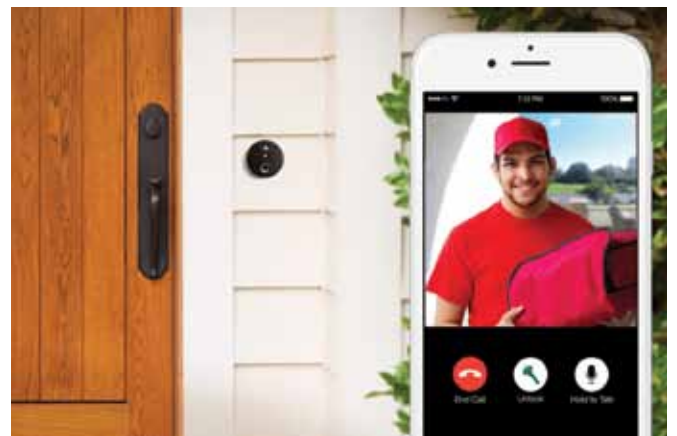
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Motion, water leak, smoke and carbon dioxide detectors as well as wi-fi cameras can all be automated. Some apps even use geofencing technology to sense when the homeowners are away and adjust smart features accordingly. AAA Alarms (an MTS company), specializes in automating security systems and integrating multiple features to keep your home and family secure. In addition to 24-hour monitoring services, AAA provides additional support when homeowners are on the go.

Motion, water leak, smoke and carbon dioxide detectors as well as wi-fi cameras can all be automated.

"If anything happens to a customer's security system while they are away from their home, we will alert them using our Take Control app," says Jason Sawatzky, media relations and communications specialist for MTS. The ability to address an issue as it's happening could reduce the risk of further damage and cost.

To learn more about smart-home technology and accompanying apps, visit the many Parade of Homes show homes outfitted by AAA Alarms, Accurate Technology, Advance Electronics and K&S Electronics, or visit company showrooms.





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