

Welcome Home

Technology trends for the home

You're on your way to work when you suddenly have the horrible feeling you might have left the oven on. No problem—you dial it with your cell phone and shut it off. From work, one click on the Internet unlocks your front door for the plumber.

A scene from *The Jetsons*? No, reality: a new reality being brought to life by innovations in home automation.

Welcome to the "smart home"

"Smart home" is the term commonly used to define a residence that uses a central controller to integrate the home's various systems. For example, you might have a preprogrammed setting called "I'm Home" that you can trigger from a remote control when you approach your driveway. In response, the system might turn on the driveway and garage lights, disarm the security system, open the garage door, turn up the thermostat, and turn the TV on to the evening news.

"Smart home" products were once marketed solely on the basis of convenience. But today, home automation is finding a new market among the energy-conscious because of both cost and environmental considerations. Some of the most popular trends are in the areas of lighting and automation controls, home entertainment, security systems and home healthcare monitoring systems.



Home Pricing Guide

Today you can choose from a wide range of high definition (HD) TVs that deliver startlingly clear pictures on a variety of screens including LCD, plasma, DLP and LCoS. Super-thin is in, and for those who believe bigger is better you'll soon be able to purchase 150-inch televisions, big enough to display a person life-size!

New interactive virtual-reality gaming technologies, such as Nintendo's Wii system, are also gaining ground. But of all the home entertainment innovations, perhaps one of the most useful is a new MP3 dock that lets you access and transmit your entire library of music and movies throughout the house.

Security systems

Home surveillance systems are more sophisticated than ever, with options that include wireless transmission, motion detection and night vision. You can even monitor systems remotely via the web or a

Lighting and automation

Just about everything you plug in can be networked into a centralized home automation system. You can set a group of actions to happen at pre-set times, to activate when certain events occur, or to start with the touch of a remote or a cue from a cell phone. So, for instance, you can press one button to automatically start cooking the lasagna that's been refrigerating in your oven, draw the shades, dim the living room lights and turn on your favorite music. Going on vacation? New systems can even protect your home while you're away by taking a snapshot of light usage in the house over the past two weeks, then mimicking the series.

The industry still has a way to go in terms of a unified standard format and ease of use, but the promise is there. And the hope for energy savings as well, with programs that help you monitor your entire home's energy usage and fine-tune it to eliminate waste.

Let the show begin

The concept of a "digital hearth" is taking hold in, with electronic entertainment replacing the fireplace as a place to socialize with family and friends.

cell phone—adjusting the tilt, pan or zoom with the touch of a key.

And while surveillance systems used to be for the rich and famous, almost one in four homes in the currently has one. Not surprising considering that a basic one-camera system today can cost less than \$300.

Home health monitoring systems

The field of telehealth is growing almost as fast as the aging baby boom generation, with innovations that help keep family members in their own homes longer.

Devices can alert patients when it's time to take their blood pressure, weight, blood oxygen level, temperature or pulse, then send the data directly from the device to a health-care professional. Systems can even remind homeowners, with voice commands and light cues, when it's time to take medications, and notify the user if the wrong medication is selected.

The future is here

Speedcook ovens that use microwave and light technologies to cook food up to 15 times faster. Digital mixers that can pre-set water temperatures in the shower to adjust to each user's personal preference. Yard-watering systems that automatically schedule waterings based on the latest NOAA satellite information. These are just a few of the technologies that are available today to make your life easier. And that might just give your home a unique edge when it comes time to put it on the market.