



GET SMART!

HOW HOME AUTOMATION CAN HELP A SECURITY COMPANY'S BOTTOM LINE

By Angela Rotundo

Imagine the convenience and efficiency of controlling the lights in one's living room, the air conditioning in the basement and closing the garage door from the comfort of the couch. When it comes to technology for the home, the world is definitely getting smarter.

Increasingly popular and cost effective, home automation allows homeowners to control all of their home systems, including security, through one interface. People who enjoy smart home technology can manage in-home systems, such as: home networking, home automation and communication systems, media rooms, single or multi-room entertainment systems, and integrated whole-house sub-systems providing lighting control, HVAC systems and security.

SECURITY COMPANIES STARTING TO BRANCH OUT

Utz Baldwin, chief executive officer of the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association (CEDIA), knows a thing or two about home automation and how it is becoming a bigger part of the security industry, particularly security companies looking to branch out and offer their customers alternative services and products. Over the past few years, Baldwin and his team at CEDIA have shown a keen interest in reaching out to members of the security industry because he knows that consumer adoption of technologies is "exploding."

"The products and services offered by home automation providers have evolved over the years," says Baldwin. "Today, the industry is becoming largely IP-centric, connecting more devices and creating the need to develop applications for the solutions consumers seek."

On reflection on how much home automation has changed the security industry, Baldwin recalls that in earlier years, most CEDIA members focused on music systems, media rooms and home theaters. Then, in the early 1990s, came control systems that simplified the use of A/V, and then shortly afterwards, CEDIA members began integrating multiple systems, including security, fire & life safety and environmental controls and monitoring.

Baldwin isn't the only one aware of the impact smart home automation has on Canada's security and alarm industry. According to Rawlson King, communications director of the Continental Automated Buildings Association (CABA), home automation — because of the sophistication of consumer electronics — is poised to be an emerging sector of the security industry.

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

"All of these technologies are now converging, and they're really a catalyst for control," notes King. "The future looks bright — you're going to see a market that is growing exponentially in the billions because a lot of the home automation components are all about integrating consumer electronics."

King supports his claim with evidence that any security company would want to know. He says that a recent study forecasts the global smart homes market to touch \$13.4 billion by 2014. Similarly King adds that, ABI Research predicts home automation systems shipments will exceed \$11.8 billion in value by 2015, encompassing the luxury, mainstream, do-it-yourself and managed segments of the home automation market.

If the security and alarm industry is to know anything about smart home automation, then it has to be that these are critical systems and require engineering and project management skills. Baldwin stresses that the key to understanding the need and ideals behind smart home automation is education.

In today's day and age, feeling safe within their comfy abode is what every homeowner wants to feel. To have that ability to control that safety from almost anywhere brings a peace of mind like never before, suggests Peter Weglicki, sales representative from Automation 4 Home.

"Today's systems push open a door to the new generation of control systems, which thus allows customers to get notified by e-mail, SMS or telephone call when there is an unplanned activity in their house," says Weglicki.

A TREND THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED

When asked what the appeal behind smart home automation is for consumers, Weglicki notes that it doesn't take a genius to figure out.

"They are mostly looking for solutions that will make their lives easier, safer and more enjoyable, but in a lot of cases they are dealing with a problem that they just want taken care of," he says. "Customers are now given more choice to check on their house remotely using their cell phone or Internet connection. They can view live feeds from multiple points, move the cameras, make sure all the doors are secured and even open or close their garage door or a gate if they want to."

And Weglicki isn't alone in thinking that this new technology can work for everyone. Sean Baghai, owner of Baghai Digital in Toronto, Ont., thinks that with a little reading any security business can stay on top of this growing trend within the alarm and security industry.

"Once your mindset is there, it's very easy [for a business] to adopt new products and new technologies, such as home automation, and to get involved in things that aren't your core business," says Baghai. "If you're dedicated to the industry, that being the alarm industry, businesses will have very little choice but to diversify into home automation."

By staying on top of how home automation has influenced the alarm industry, Baghai knows firsthand how this new technology is affecting the business of security, essentially moving forward.

"Most alarm companies started selling only residential security systems, but with the competition they had no choice but to diversify, so the majority of independents started offering more services, moving towards smart home automation, providing all the network wiring, cable wiring and integrating them," he explains. "This was due partially to diminishing profits in the alarm business, so the bottom line was a big factor."

While Baldwin hopes more security companies jump on the home automation bandwagon he does know that consumers like their technology, particularly gadgets.

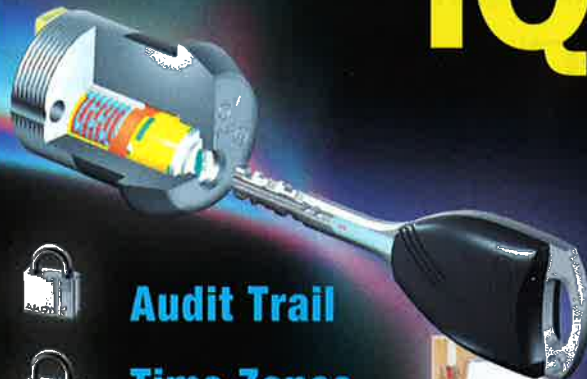
"With the rapid pace of innovation and the way technology continues to permeate the lifestyle of the average consumer," he says, "homeowners are developing a higher comfort level with advanced technology and also developing higher expectations for the capabilities of home automation systems."

Trends today's security and alarm companies can no longer ignore. 🍁

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