

Homes Adopt Streamlined Electronic Functionality

by Phoebe Chongchua

Tight economic times don't seem to be dampening the desire to streamline electronic home improvements. According to The Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association (CEDIA), 2009 looks to be a promising year for electronic home upgrades in the areas of energy efficiency, mobile home management, flat panel display adoption, digital transitioning, and wireless integration.

"Housing prices and new home construction are at an all-time low right now. Instead of trying to sell, many homeowners have turned to retrofitting their homes and investing in comforts that will make their home more enjoyable," said Utz Baldwin, CEO, CEDIA in a recent news release. "The trends and technologies we've identified are upgrades that will enhance homeowner satisfaction and ultimately add to a home's value."

David Pedigo the Sr. Director of Technology at CEDIA says before you electronically retrofit your home, "Think about what you want not just now but three to five years from now." He says be sure to take into consideration future wiring needs such as connecting computers to your TV to stream shows right into your living room or, if you have toddlers, think about several years from now and the necessary wiring to connect their video equipment. "Making sure the house is wired to support all those mechanisms is certainly a big deal." According to CEDIA, green energy-efficient home technology is very popular.

So, too, is mobile connectivity. CEDIA reports in its news release that, "Residential security, audio/video and automation systems are being integrated into fully functional mobile devices. For instance, CEDIA experts are installing systems that make it possible for homeowners to turn on the air conditioning remotely, open the garage door after walking the dog and even start the oven for dinner, all with a push of a button on their cellular device." Pedigo explained the most popular upgrades.

1. Structured wiring system: all cables are pulled to a single outlet within the home. It gives the homeowner a lot of flexibility. "It's very easy then to upgrade from cable TV to satellite or from regular phone service to, say, Internet-based Voice-Over IP (VOIP)," says David Pedigo, Sr. Director of Technology, The Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association (CEDIA).

2. Automation for daylight harvesting: allows homeowners to use touch panels or computers to control the home. "We can do what's called 'daylight harvesting' which is we can take the shades, motorize those shades at certain times of the day based on an astrological clock. I know the sun is going to come into the living room in the mornings and that's going to heat up the house and let's say it's summer, so we want the shades to go down so that the morning sun is not heating up the inside of the house and causing the air conditioner to run more. Then around one or two o'clock, those shades go up because the sun is now over the top of the house and by four or five o'clock, the shades on the other side of the home are going down. So, we're 'harvesting the daylight' to decrease the amount of heating and cooling that's required within the home.

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3. Monitoring systems: products that are installed to monitor the energy consumption for particular outlets, water, or gas. "I can have a sensor in the master bathroom and then I can have a sensor in the kids' bathrooms," says Pedigo. "I have a 10-year old daughter who is now getting into the I-want-to-take-a-30-minute shower." He says with sensors installed he can monitor and determine where and with whom water consumption needs to be addressed.

Pedigo says it will also help to spot which outlets are using up a lot of energy and increasing your bill. He says you can then decide if you need to replace whatever electrical device is connected to the outlet with a more energy-efficient product.

4. Media servers: are computer appliances that allow you from a central location to view videos, music, Internet video-streamed shows, and more. "We're seeing a real shift in consumer viewing," says Pedigo. He says, "You'll see more and more that the content that you get on your display, is actually Internet-streamed content. You'll be watching a YouTube or a media server like Boxee or something like that to control all of your content on your TV and it's basically coming from a computer inside the TV or you'll be using an Internet connection to interface between the two." Pedigo says more TVs are being sold with an Internet jack that's on the back of the TV, enabling a quick connection to the World Wide Web. "No one thinks about running a computer cable for your TV but you have to start thinking about that." Pedigo says it also helps streamline repair service needs. "Now that there's an Internet jack on the back of the TV, as a service company, I can figure out what's going wrong with your TV without having to make a service call because I can log right into your TV," says Pedigo.

"Without a doubt, find a professional," says Pedigo. He says homeowners will often purchase thousands of dollars of electronic equipment and then end up hiring someone who is not qualified to install it and therefore they risk damaging the equipment. "The biggest thing is to look for someone who is a professional, who is really trained, and is going to give you exactly what you need." CEDIA was founded in 1989 and has more than 3,500 member companies worldwide. Its members are established and insured businesses with bona fide qualifications and experience in the specialized field of designing and installing electronic systems for homes.

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