Review: Smarten up your home with Apple HomeKit

January 14 2015, byAnick Jesdanun

In this June 2, 2014 file photo, Apple senior vice president of Software Engineering Craig Federighi speaks about the Apple HomeKit app at the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference in San Francisco. HomeKit has the potential to bring home automation to everyday consumers. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

Apple didn't attend last week's gadget show but its presence was felt. Many companies have designed "smart" home products that integrate with Apple's HomeKit, an emerging technology for controlling lights and

appliances through a mobile app. There are other efforts to unify smart-home devices, but many of them rely on individual partnerships. That approach is slower than simply having everyone use a common set of tools—in this case, HomeKit.

——

SO WHAT IS HOMEKIT?

Think of HomeKit as a way to unify smart-home products from different manufacturers. Currently, if Acme Co. makes a light switch, you need to download Acme's app to control it remotely. Buy a garage door opener from Widget Inc., and you need to use Widget's app. With HomeKit, companies can integrate their apps into a single software platform that you control from your iPhone or iPad. (One note of caution: Companies aren't required to make rival products work with their apps; although many say they will, it's best to check before you buy.)

——

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

HomeKit's strength is its ability to group products into "rooms," "zones" and "scenes." With one tap, you can turn off every HomeKit product in a room, such as lights and stereos. You can also do that with a group of rooms, or zone. You can even use the Siri voice assistant to control your home. Saying "I feel hot" might prompt Siri to turn on the air conditioner and lower the shade for you.

Tap a "party" scene and the stereo and disco lights could turn on while your regular lamps dim. Setting up a "bedtime" scene might involve leaving just the nightlight on, while locking the front door and lowering

the heat downstairs. Sure, you can already control a set of lights and appliances by attaching them to a power strip with an on-off switch, but your options are limited to all on or all off. With HomeKit, you have the option of creating multiple combinations to match whatever ambiance you prefer.

——

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

The first requirement is an iPhone or an iPad with iOS 8.

(Sorry, Android and Windows users, you'll need a different system. Google is starting to enable similar functionality through its Nest smart thermostat and smoke detector and Microsoft is trying to enable smart-home controls using its Cortana voice assistant. Of course, if makers of smart-home products enable multiple systems—and some of them plan to—consumers won't have to worry about which device works with what.)

OK. Now you'll need a HomeKit-capable product; those will start coming out in a few months. HomeKit-enabled products certified by Apple will carry a HomeKit logo.

The easiest way to start is with a HomeKit power plug, such as ones that iHome, iDevices and Grid Connect soon plan to sell for $40 to $80 each. Your appliance hooks into that plug, which then goes into a regular electric outlet. The HomeKit power plug has a HomeKit-certified chipset with a wireless connection to get instructions from the app.

Insteon, a maker of more than 200 automated products including thermostats and light bulbs, also plans to sell a hub to make all of its existing and future products compatible with HomeKit. The HomeKit-

compatible hub will sell for $150. By contrast, it sells a $40 hub that lets you control Insteon devices through an app, but it won't work with HomeKit products from other companies.

Meanwhile, a garage-door opener from Chamberlain and door locks from Schlage will be enabled for HomeKit from the start, with no need for an intermediary power plug. Elgato's Eve home-monitoring system will have sensors to measure air quality, temperature, humidity, air pressure, energy and water consumption. Other products to come will likely include wireless speakers, lamps and security cameras.

As you start adding more HomeKit plugs and HomeKit-enabled products, you can define zones and scenes to tap into HomeKit's power.

If you have a third-generation Apple TV streaming device (released in 2012), you can use Siri to control your home from elsewhere. Otherwise, you need to tap on the app and use Siri only when you're on your home wireless network.

___

THE PROMISE

For users of Apple devices, HomeKit will be an easy way to automate your home. Apple says it will review products to ensure they are easy to use and meet its privacy and security guidelines. What will be tougher is outfitting your home with the necessary equipment, especially at $40 or more per plug.

But as you replace lights and appliances you can start building a smart home, or just buy HomeKit plugs for the essential things you want automated.

Citation: Review: Smarten up your home with Apple HomeKit (2015, January 14) retrieved 17 May 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2015-01-smarten-home-apple-homekit.html