

Review: Three ways to control your lights at home or away

February 21 2015, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News

Home automation seems to be one of those tech industry snowballs that's starting to roll downhill. The 2015 Consumer Electronics Show was packed with new ways to control your home environment.

I've been testing the Wink Hub, which brings together the [control](#) of products from many manufacturers.

Today I'm reviewing three items that all talk to the Wink Hub and are controlled with the Wink app for your smartphone or tablet.

Now is as good a time as any to make sure you've heard of the term "the Internet of things," which is a way of describing items such as [light bulbs](#) or thermostats that connect to the Internet to add functionality.

CONNECTED CREE LED BULB

I first became aware of connected bulbs with the very cool but very expensive Philips Hue lighting system. These are color-changing LED bulbs that can be controlled over the Internet from your phone.

I really liked them during my testing, but they're still expensive, at \$180 for a starter kit with three bulbs. To be fair, Philips does sell non-color changing Hue bulbs for \$29 each.

Cree, a big name in LED bulbs, didn't rush to market with its connected bulbs, but I'm glad, because there are some design elements to the bulb

that are worth the wait.

Cree's connected bulbs cost just \$15 each and are available at Home Depot, both in stores and online.

The bulbs deliver 815 lumens of 2,700K soft white light.

The bulbs differ in design from Cree's earlier models in that they don't have any external heat sinks. There are vents at the bottom and top of the bulb housing to allow for air flow.

These bulbs are the size and shape of a plain old incandescent bulb, they're shatter-proof and they weigh only a few ounces.

To control the bulbs, you'll need a home automation hub like the Wink Hub installed. Cree says its bulbs will also be compatible with Apple upcoming HomeKit standard for home automation.

From the Wink app, you can add the bulbs using a simple step-by-step on-screen guide. The process could not have been easier.

Once the bulbs are paired to the hub, you can control them from anywhere your phone or tablet has an Internet connection.

The bulbs can be controlled individually or in groups. The app also makes it simple to set the bulbs or groups to turn on or off on a schedule.

Going to be out late and want the lights on at home? No problem.

Instead of digging out that single outlet timer, home automation can turn on bulbs all over your house whenever you are away from home.

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Pros: Inexpensive compared to other connected bulbs. Easy to set up and control. Great design.

Cons: None for me, but some might call \$15 per bulb expensive.

Bottom Line: Easy way to get started with [home automation](#).

LUTRON CASETA PLUG-IN LAMP DIMMER

If you have lamps or ceiling lights that you'd like to control, Lutron has a solution with the Caseta line of switches and dimmers that can be controlled from your smartphone or a small remote.

I like this system as there is an in-wall model that replaces your traditional light switch or a plug-in model for lamps that install in a matter of seconds.

Both sell for \$59.95 at Amazon or Home Depot.

Each dimmer/switch has the same functionality - turning on or off lights and dimming and both come with a remote.

If you just want to control the lights while you are home, the remote and dimmer is all you'll need. If you'd like to add the ability to control things away from [home](#), you'll need to add a link to the Internet, which can be Lutron's own Smart Bridge (\$119.95) or a Wink Hub (\$40.36 on Amazon).

I tested the plug-in dimmer and it worked perfectly. The dimmer has two outlets to connect lamps with any type of dimmable bulb.

The corresponding smartphone app will also let you set schedules for turning the lights on or off.

These dimmer/switches bring smart functionality to lamps and fixtures that use traditional, "non-connected" bulbs.

Pros: Inexpensive. Super easy to control. Remote control.

Cons: None.

Bottom Line: Great way to add a remote dimmer switch to any lamp.

LEVITON PLUG-IN APPLIANCE MODULE (DZPA1)

This module isn't a dimmer; it's purely for turning the power on or off to a light or small appliance.

The DZPA1 (\$44.95 from Amazon or Home Depot) is designed for LED, CFL and incandescent, fluorescent and low-voltage lights and motor loads of up to one-half horsepower.

I tested it only with an iced tea maker and a lamp, but it worked perfectly. Like the others, it uses the Wink Hub or any Z-Wave controller and can be accessed remotely and scheduled in advance.

Pros: Inexpensive. Easy to configure and control.

Cons: Customer reviews online indicate a small amount of electricity leaks through when the module is off.

Bottom Line: For most situations, this is a good remote switch.

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