

Online homes becoming mindful members of the family

9 January 2015, by Glenn Chapman



An LG representative uses a smartphone to control an LG front loading washing machine at the Consumer Electronics Show on January 6, 2015. AFP Photo / Getty : David Becker

From door bells that scrutinize visitors to washing machines that know when you're home and lights that click off when you get in bed, houses are getting smarter.

The trend of once-dumb fixtures and [appliances](#) being given the brains to respond to, or even anticipate people's needs was on display at the Consumer Electronics Show that ends Friday in Las Vegas.

US [home](#) improvement shop chain Lowe's built a mock house on the cavernous show floor to demonstrate Iris, a globe-shaped device that acts as a hub for using smartphones to control lights, thermostats, outlets and more.

CES was rife with Internet-linked smart light bulbs, door locks, wall outlets for smart homes.

Hubs used as command centers for gadgets in homes plug into the Internet and then connect with compatible fixtures, locks, [security cameras](#), appliances or other objects wirelessly using new technologies such as ZigBee or Z-Wave.

Internet connections let hubs exchange information, alerts or messages with applications in smartphones or tablet computers.

Watching over the family

The system in the Lowe's smart house could alert parents to the arrival home of their children, thanks to a signal from a special fob attached to their key rings.

Window blinds could be opened or closed on commands, and a sensor affixed to a dog's collar signaled a doggy door to unlock when a pet neared.

Smart home systems can also synch to [surveillance cameras](#) and motion detectors, allowing people to monitor their homes without costly service contracts with security companies.



Smart home gadgetry on display by Lowe's home improvement shop chain at the Consumer Electronics Show January 8, 2015 in Las Vegas

The demo home also featured a box that connected to the water line and sends a message to the home owner if change in flow indicates a leak or burst pipe.

"And everything we have is do-it-yourself," a Lowe's spokesperson said while guiding AFP through the mock home.

A Ring to rule them all

German home appliance titan Bosch showed off its connected home system that uses sensors and cameras for its creations to communicate with one another, even letting people virtually glimpse into refrigerators while shopping to see what they might need.

Logbar, which has offices in Japan and Silicon Valley, was catching attention with a Bluetooth-

enabled ring that, when worn, allowed people to control smartphones using gestures.

Logbar is planning to release a Ring Hub disk that will synch with the rings to allow infra-red enabled televisions, lights, appliances and other things in homes to be controlled with gesture.

"You don't need many remote controllers; all you need is this ring," Momoko Matsuzaki of Logbar told AFP.

"Then, when you leave your house you can also control your phone with it."



Dean Kurutz watches two WINBOT W930 window cleaning robots by Ecovacs Robotics at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on January 8, 2015

South Korean [consumer electronics](#) giant Samsung used CES to announce that not only is it working toward making nearly all of its devices "connected" but that it is opening the platform to software developers and hardware makers.

Allowing rival home devices to "speak" to each other through a common hub promises to ramp adoption faster than forcing consumers to pick between systems that work only with one company's products.

Forrester analyst Frank Gillett referred to the various hubs and systems for connected homes as being in a "fragmented battle."

Google is pushing into the market through smart-thermostat maker Nest, which it bought a year ago in a deal valued at \$3.2 billion.

A growing list of household things or services that work with Nest was unveiled at CES.

Among them were a car-charging station that lets users know when energy prices are high and a washer and dryer that switch to quieter modes when people are home.

There was also a smart door lock that starts warming or cooling the house when someone arrives home and sets the thermostat to an away mode to save energy when someone locks up on the way out.

"Things that magically happen around your house aren't just sci-fi anymore," Nest co-founder and head of engineering Matt Rogers said in a blog post.

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