

casa integration opinion

Your Home Technology Professionals

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The More Things Change . . . Today's Technically Modern Home

That well-used French proverb applies to many things in life, and it certainly is relevant to the topic of home technology in today's finest homes. Example: what technology components are used now? Everyone knows things have changed – but how much have they really changed?

For almost 15 years now, we've designed, implemented and maintained comprehensive network, A/V, and control systems in world-class properties. We'd like to share with you an overview of how we're doing that today.

This Definitely Stays the Same

While technology, for the home and elsewhere, moves forward at a literally break-neck pace, the process by which it is properly implemented has not changed. While some aspects of home technology have been simplified, others are more complex – and more vital – than ever. So the project lifecycle still matters.

We're old-school and proud of it: the Design-Engineering-Implementation-Support paradigm works and remains our methodology for all but the smallest of projects.

Wiring? Isn't Everything Wireless?

This has changed, but only a little.

First, even in the most leading-edge homes in which we work, we still are providing at least 2 or 3 locations at which a traditional telephone can be connected. Even in this smartphone-driven world, it's just silly not to run cabling for a landline.

And we still run basic cabling for standard cable or

Continued: see "The More Things Change . . .", overleaf

Dialed In/Not Dialed In

Great/Not Great Things in Home Technology Today

Dialed In:

- **Real-World 4K TV pricing:** it's been nice to see how aggressively the TV companies have priced this year's 4K TV's. They're low enough that it hardly makes sense to consider a 1080p set any longer . . .
- **Comcast's Improving Broadband Speeds:** don't faint – yes, we're praising the monopolistic beast from Philly. They are promising *gigabit* (100 megabits per second from them is great now – gigabit will be 10 times faster) broadband access being available in most markets in the next 6 – 12 months. Wow – almost as good as what they've had in South Korea for years!

Not Dialed In

- **Apple Watch:** we've been wrong before, and we know it has its fans, but it sure looks like Tim, Jony, and the rest of the gang in Cupertino have jumped the shark on this one. Until this device can deliver full functionality *without* an iPhone nearby, we mostly don't get it.
- **Sonos as a Stubborn Mule:** as any client of ours over the past several years knows, we're HUGE fans of the Sonos whole-home audio system. It has been and continues to be our go-to. But their absolute refusal to build products better suited to large implementations has opened the door to others, including Denon's HEOS, and CasaTunes. We remain firmly in the Sonos camp, but still . . .

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satellite TV connections throughout the home. And no new home we work on is ever without true >= 1 gigabit Ethernet connections at appropriate spots – like at desks and workstations, and at all TV's. And also to other locations with stationary items that may benefit now or in the future from a quality Internet connection.

Quality WiFi is at the top of everybody's list, and it's certainly at the tippy-top of ours. We use only commercial-grade access points, complemented by a cloud-based management system. But real WiFi requires real wires, run to the appropriate locations. That hasn't changed.

With the success of Sonos, many ask us about "wireless" speakers. First, unless a speaker is battery-powered, there is no such thing as a truly wireless speaker – an electrical connection is still necessary. And most of our clients want to minimize the esthetic impact of things like speakers – that means they want them built-in to the ceiling or wall. But you can't do that with the Sonos "wireless" speakers, so yes, we still run speaker wiring.

But . . . are we running less wires overall? Yes, somewhat. But don't discount the continued importance of a stout wired infrastructure in your home.

That's Entertainment

Speakers (and as above, they're almost always built-in), are part of nearly every home – most people enjoy music, and want it in many/most of parts of their home.

Speakers also complement the televisions we put in, and yes, people are still watching and enjoying TV. The big news with TV is the dawn of the 4K era. Offering roughly 4 times the resolution of the sun-setting 1080p standard, we recommend 4K TV's now for all but the smallest screen sizes. It's that good.

So while we're still installing TV's, and very nice ones at that, what's changed is that "watching TV" now means, in large part, either streaming a show via Netflix or its ilk, or watching a show you recorded on your DVR. There are great alternatives out there for getting it all in one box, yet without being beholden (much) to Comcast or DirecTV.

Other than streaming and DVR's, in the near future, 4K Blu-Ray discs and players will arrive. Given the somewhat "arthritic" nature of broadband in some parts of the US, streaming 4K content may not be ideal, so 4K Blu-Ray discs will have a role.

Knock Knock! Who's There?

Something that has definitely changed over the past 15 years is that most of our projects now involve one

Continued: see next column

or more surveillance cameras, to see what's happening at the front door and elsewhere at home from anywhere, with just a smartphone. Equally exciting are the next-gen intercoms we're installing that are connected to the Internet and allow you to see and talk with visitors to your home – again, from anywhere in the world, with just a smartphone.

Staying Rational

We've saved the best for last in our summary of today's technically modern home. And that topic is "home automation" - without a doubt the buzzword du jour.

In general, home automation expands upon things like lighting, shade, and heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) control, to make one or many things happen, when a "trigger" occurs. A trigger might be a particular time of day, or someone pressing a button.

Indeed, by interfacing those subsystems with others like your security, pool/spa, and irrigation systems, much can be accomplished, the most useful being "Home" and "Away" functionality. Pressing the "Home" button on a keypad or in an app might make the lights come on, set the thermostat, open or close the shades, turn off the security system, etc. Pressing "Away" does the opposite, setting the home's subsystems for it being unoccupied. This clearly has benefits, in terms of energy savings, safety and more.

But does one need to invest in expensive control systems (Savant, Crestron, Control4, Elan, etc.) for this functionality? For the most part, and as we've said for years now, no. With the careful selection of the subsystems mentioned above, most of the benefits can be realized with zero added hardware or programming. How? Because the subsystems you'll likely be installing anyhow – things like lighting control, thermostats and security – come with *native* smartphone apps that are extremely capable and that facilitate a lot of "automation" in and of themselves.

Do not get us wrong – there are times when we'll use a third-party control system to integrate devices in order to deliver true Home/Away functionality. But again, not always, and typically not at all if the home's most important subsystems are carefully chosen. For example, if Lutron's middle or upper-tier products are chosen for lighting control, just opening the garage door can trigger nearly all of the "Home" functionality most people want or need.

But "Integration" is, after all, a part of our name, and it's what we do. And that will stay the same . . . ■