Technical Wizardry: the rise of the smart home

Only four years ago, the global home automation market was worth nearly $40 million. With it forecast to reach nearly $82 billion by 2023**[i]**, home automation is on the cusp of big things – and that was before Covid-19 landed. Lockdown has forced us all to spend more time at home and to reflect on how our personal space can better support the way we live, work and play. Perhaps it won't be long before the 'smart home' is as common as the smartphone, and we will wonder how we managed without it.

Majik House is a smart-home installation company based in Kirby Lonsdale, not far from Sanlam's office. The company was founded over 20 years ago by Tim Burrow, who wanted to turn his passion for building smart music systems around the home into a business.

The growing and insatiable appetite for technology has meant that Tim, and his wife Carol, now run a highly successful company integrating and connecting all sorts of appliances for their clients. Carol said: "Our customers want to be able to centrally and remotely manage their security, lighting and entertainment systems. They may even want to be able to feed the dog while in the office or out with friends. We help them choose the right technology, integrate their systems, and provide a home hub and app that enables them to operate everything from a single device. We even had a client who wanted to start running his bath from his helicopter."

Convenience

While smart-home technology may have been a toy for the rich and famous, it is now becoming more affordable, and commonplace in homes across the UK. Behind the technology lies the so-called 'internet of things', which uses sensors on appliances to feed live information to the internet, which then sends commands to a device. For example, you could arrive home and your lights will automatically come on, your garage door will open, and your TV will be switched to your favourite channel as you walk through the door.

It's also about convenience and being able to control various devices from one place. You could be lying in bed and the doorbell rings. Without getting up, you can control the lights, see who is at the door and let them in if you choose to do so.

Security

The technology also lends itself extremely well to security. If you are on holiday, you can control your lights and blinds to make it look like there is someone at home. Or you can ensure all your lights are turned on when you return home from work. This is a growth area for Majik House. According to Carol, "Security is a big issue for some of our clients. From remotely operated gates and houses that lock automatically at a predetermined time to panic rooms. Our systems allow those hiding in a panic room during a burglary to contact the police and watch what is happening in their homes".

A design feature

But smart-home technology isn't just about practical solutions. Increasingly, it is central to interior design and is also a key consideration in the architectural and build phases of new properties and extensions. From ensuring cameras and speakers around the house can't be seen to hiding televisions behind paintings or creating entertainment rooms both inside and out, it seems anything goes. Carol said: "One of our clients installed a miniature version of the Bellagio in Las Vegas. He wanted to be able to quietly push a button so that the fountain would start, lights would come on and music would play."

The future of smart-home technology

As with most technology, the rise in uptake of smart-home products will continue to grow:

- 22% of households currently own a voice-controlled digital home assistant, compared with just 11% in 2017. And the rise of these devices is set to continue, with 41% of households planning to own one in the next five

years.

- While only 12% of households currently have a smart-heating system and 9% have a smart-security system, these are set to rise to 41% and 37% within five years.

- Also, in the next five years, 19% of households plan to have a smart-fridge and 17% a smart-oven.

- 44% of 18–24-year-olds believe the price of smart-home products is reasonable, compared to 34% in 2017. Younger users have the most positive attitude to the products and with falling prices, cost is less of a barrier for them.

But, despite the encouraging adoption outlook, general awareness is not growing at the same pace. Familiarity with smart-home features and benefits stands at 49%, the same level as in 2017. And the proportion of consumers who understand the term 'internet of things' remains static, at 38%. Understandably, 71% of households are concerned about the ability of hackers to access internet-connected appliances or security products.

The robots are coming

So, while there remains some barriers to adoption, it is a matter of time before in-home technology solutions become the norm. Indeed, Carol believes voice control will become ubiquitous in the next few years, while televisions will arrive rolled up like a scroll to be hung on the wall. And the robots are coming, she says. "They're already on their way and it won't be long before you have one sitting in the corner of your room with its own personality. That's the house of the future."

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[i] https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/home-automation-market <
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