

The New Connected Home

How technology trends are changing the role of the home in our lives.

By Caitlin Clinard ■ Connexion Technologies

More than 50 years ago, people were bringing televisions into their homes for the first time. Twenty-five years ago, the telephone you could take anywhere, the cell phone, was commercialized. And 15 years ago, a little thing called e-mail was gaining popularity at CompuServe and AOL on the eve of the World Wide Web.

That brings us to today. As the presence of technology in our lives changes, so does the role of our homes. Technology has become so integrated into our daily lives that we have increased the number of "consumer" electronic devices to 25 per household...compared to 1.3 in 1975!* That statistic (it doesn't include household appliances like irons and refrigerators, by the way) is evidence that a new age has created a new home: the Connected Home .

These homes are expected to handle technologies like Internet, WiFi, High-definition television, satellite dishes, community intranets and energy management, to name a few. As more and more pressures push down on the Connected Home, convergence of these technologies becomes challenging. That's why Connexion Technologies has created a technology ecosystem – a partnering approach that makes the convergence of technologies in the home as seamless as possible.

“You can't talk about building a house without talking about the future anymore because the future could be six months down the road,” said Jason Scutt, executive vice president of Strategic Development and Enterprise Product Group for Connexion Technologies. “It sounds a bit cliché but technology is changing that fast.”

Glen Lang, CEO of Connexion Technologies, agrees. “Technology has changed the way we think about our homes. No longer do homes simply sustain us. They connect us to the outside

world and enhance our lifestyles.”

That's why building a Connected Home has never been more important or more challenging. The ideal Connected Home can be recognized by the following:

- Structured wiring
- Fiber optic backbone
- Whole home automation
- Smart appliances
- Integrated services/billing
- High-speed connectivity
- Universal remote/control center

This Connected Home demands more bandwidth than ever before. As

new applications emerge every day, traditional coaxial/copper wiring simply cannot keep up with the expectations of buyers. Although few realize it, their expectations require a network that can handle emerging technologies as they come to market.

Technology Ecosystem

Connexion Technologies is helping developers build the Connected Home by deploying fiber optic networks, with virtually unlimited bandwidth, throughout communities in the US. But this network is only part of the bigger picture. The convergence of the technologies over that network is just as important.

Homes and hospitality properties alike have a need for this convergence. Life-enhancing technology products and systems must be built right into the foundations of homes (and of resorts, hotels, college dorms and so forth) with structured network wiring, or the experience won't be seamless. That's why Connexion Technologies created its technology ecosystem approach.

“In the age of convergence, common sense rules,” says Scutt. “If all parties involved don't come in as a cohesive unit...with all the vendors and providers working together and being managed by one source...they have no incentive to reduce redundancies; consistency in service becomes virtually impossible.”

Ginn Resorts

Take, for example, Ginn Resorts. Managing its multiple technology vendors and providers to work together was a daunting undertaking that resulted in

inconsistent and unsatisfactory services, not to mention a lot of overhead. Ginn Resorts was staffing several hundred people just to get the job done. Then it partnered with Connexion Technologies, which brought all the involved parties together and coordinated them into one seamless group.

Scutt notes that the partnerships include leading vendors like Circuit City. Through the partnership, Circuit City installed the low-voltage wiring for Ginn Resort Properties and supplied Ginn with a suite of consumer electronics.

“Previously, we had contracts with multiple companies at various locations. With Connexion Technologies handling everything, it not only helped our projects, but also provided better service for our residents,” said Al Jones, president of Ginn Lifestyles Group, a division of Ginn Resorts.

Kellswater Bridge

Developer George Kiser of Kellswater Bridge also realized the importance of the Connected Home. “We aimed not only to offer a great amenity but also to future-proof our [master-planned] community,” he says.

After choosing fiber-optic technology to deliver services to his residents, Kiser faced an early challenge. He knew he wanted the Connected Homes in his community to deliver services flawlessly, but he had a multitude of builders working on his homes with varying degrees of inside wiring expertise. Kiser knew if the inside wiring didn’t match the outside wiring in his homes, services would not be delivered to their fullest potential.

After building the fiber optic network, Connexion Technologies again partnered with Circuit City, which took charge of installing the low-voltage wiring throughout the development. Kiser now has Connected Homes with outside wiring that interfaces with the inside wiring, creating a smooth experience.

Powell Place

And then there’s Bryson Powell, Project Manager of East West Partners for Powell Place in Pittsboro, North Carolina.

He agrees that the role of the home has changed over time and that the Connected Home now serves as a means to adapt to future advancements in cable and wireless technologies.

“People want their home technology to work together in an efficient and practical manner with the end goal of simplifying and enhancing their quality of life,” he says. “And there’s not as much emphasis on leaving the home in search of information and entertainment.”

Telecommuting

This explains one of the newest trends that the Connected Home has created: telecommuting. According to Joe Savage, President of the FTTH Council, “High bandwidth is changing our culture.”**

A recent study performed by RVA Market Research and sponsored by the FTTH Council has shown that high-bandwidth connections are enabling more people to work from home. Thirteen percent of FTTH subscribers are working from home more often since they got fiber – increasing to a monthly average of 7.3 more workdays at home instead of the office. Telecommuters say that having a fiber connection helps them convince employers to allow them to work from home. Fiber-enabled telecommuting could have a wide impact as FTTH services expand to more people in the coming years.

Because FTTH is starting to impact telecommuting patterns, this is resulting in fewer cars on the road, fewer gallons of gasoline being consumed, a reduction in greenhouse gases, and less traffic-induced stress on working Americans.

Looking Ahead

So what’s to come? Well, Connected Homes are opening up avenues for home schooling, medical care, and videoconferencing. Soon, cell phones will be able to dock into landlines just as an iPod can dock into a sound system.

“There is no question that more and more pressure will come down on the technology and infrastructure of the home,” Scutt says. “Part of the problem is that residents aren’t educated about

the demands that are being placed on their homes. It’s the responsibility of the developer and their builders to educate the resident about what’s coming.”

So the question becomes not whether developers are educating residents but whether they’re building homes that are future proof or homes that will become obsolete as technologies continue to change. **BBP**

About the Author:

Caitlin Clinard is the Press and Media Coordinator for Connexion Technologies, a fiber-optic amenity company. Connexion Technologies designs, builds and operates fiber networks in single family, multifamily, high-rise, resort and hospitality properties from coast to coast. Caitlin can be reached at caitlin.clinard@cnxntech.com. See also www.connexiontechnologies.net.

References

- *Kanellos, Michael, “Home Electronics for the Holidays,” CNET News, 15 Nov 2006, http://www.news.com/2100-1041_3-6135955.html.
- **“Fiber to the Home Drives Telework, Home Business,” Killer App Magazine, 12 July 2007, http://www.killerapp.com/content/publish/article_392.shtml.

Join us next month as we delve into the future. Connexion Technologies invests time and money into researching the future needs/wants/trends of consumers. It continually strives to keep developers one step ahead of their competition.