

Homes Of The Future Will Have High IQ's

By J. Lennox Scott

Welcome to your “smart” kitchen where your oven mitt tells you if your casserole is cooked all the way through, and if not, then tells you to put the food back in the oven—and for how long. Your smart refrigerator can tell you with 80 percent accuracy what’s sitting on its shelves. And if you have tomatoes, an onion, and some pasta, it will also suggest that you make spaghetti for dinner.

Or, imagine waking up in the morning, your window blinds slowly rise and your lamps adjust perfectly. Freshly brewed coffee awaits you, along with just-baked muffins from your microwave. Sound a little out of this world? Well, maybe right now, but not for long because a home with a high IQ isn’t as far away as you might think. Today, you can already automate just about anything from your heat, lights, security system, appliances, audio and video systems, telephone, and window blinds to your home office—as long as it has a microprocessor that leads to a hub and special wiring. Sounds complicated, but it’s not, really.

So what is home networking, exactly? Home networking refers to technology that connects PCs for the purpose of sharing peripherals or a broadband connection. Wireless networking is one of several ways to connect the computers in your home. It creates a network by sending radio-frequency signals between your computers to share information. Right now, home networking means that a home’s wiring links the thermostat, lighting, and security system via an internet connection that is controlled by a remote control. Not-so-distant-future home networking translates to internet connections that link all of a home’s systems and appliances to a central networking system. In other words, a repairman appears at your doorstep to fix your refrigerator, but you didn’t call them. Rather, the refrigerator is connected to a network that automatically communicates to a service center on your behalf, which then dispatches the repairman.

Large companies like Whirlpool, General Electric, Maytag, Sun Microsystems, and Microsoft are all experimenting with smart appliances and home networking systems. In fact, Microsoft offers a glimpse of this future home at a prototype facility at its headquarters in Redmond. One notable feature is a smart closet mirror that incorporates gesture recognition technology to help people decide what to wear. When clothing is held up to the mirror, it recognizes the items by RFID tags and intelligently matches them with other items in the closet. The mirror even knows what’s at the dry cleaners.

The home of the future no longer needs keys either. Instead it uses a biometric palm reader to identify individuals, open the door, and allow residents to enter. And once you walk through the front door the home activates your personal environment. The home's lights dim to your favorite specifications, the temperature is comfortably set, the draperies rise or fall to create a mood, and your favorite music starts playing. Home networking of the future will also involve having your PC check traffic reports and then setting your alarm clock accordingly. As you can tell, the home of the future essentially acts as an invisible personal assistant, tirelessly catering to your preferences and needs.

Home networking is really just beginning to hit its stride. Many of the homes being built today are starting to use highly specialized wiring as part of the basic infrastructure and a number of companies are focusing significant resources on developing new networking technology. For some, talk of electronic gadgets and so-called connected homes may be a source of confusion, but for others, the "smart" home is evolving into a new way of life.

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