

Security Professionals Secure New Revenue Streams

BY PAMELA WINIKOFF

America's fascination with technology is likely to be long-lived, and it's among the key catalysts fueling the growth of today's multi billion dollar home automation market. As a society that has grown increasingly dependent upon cell-phones, IPODs, PDAs, GPSs, digital cameras and hotmail accounts, it's clear just how tied to technology we have become. We have eagerly embraced it, not just in our classrooms and corporate boardrooms but in our living rooms, dining rooms, cars and bedrooms.

For many Americans, the dream of homeownership is richly sweetened by the technology that enables us to secure greater creature comforts from our homes. These include such amenities as digital cable and satellite TV, efficient year-round temperature control, high-speed Internet access, networked computers and peripherals and lights that can automatically turn themselves on and off for convenience and energy savings.

But ask any homeowner and chances are that they'll respond that there's something far more critical to them than these amenities: the safety of their family and their property. According to recent findings by Parks Associates, a Dallas-based research and consulting firm specializing in residential home automation, growing numbers of U.S. households will add dealer-installed security systems at escalating rates with penetration of these systems growing to one-third of all U.S. homes by 2009.

Other research by Parks Associates suggests that the popularity of the Internet and broadband services will encourage security systems professionals to offer systems that let homeowners remotely monitor their property over the Internet, which in turn will help drive the sale of these systems.

An Industry With a Secure Future

Despite recent declines in crime rates throughout the country, the security systems market continues to experience significant expansion, particularly since 9/11.



The purchase of a home security system is generally the first step a homeowner will take to automate their home. Like home automation systems, most security systems consist of a network of sensors, transmitters, receivers, and keypads wired together and hooked up to a central processor. Some security systems offer more than basic intrusion detection and signaling capabilities; they also detect and signal for events such as fires, floods, gas and carbon monoxide leaks and activate the appropriate response mechanism in the home. Still other systems can control

lighting and appliances, heating/air conditioning and audio and video systems. Thus these systems contain within them the basic infrastructure to automate a diverse array of home control functions.

Home automation is the use of microprocessor-based transmitters and receivers to control specific functions within the home. Home automation systems normally take the form of a central control unit and several user interfaces such as touchpads, hand-held keypads, panic buttons, TV screens, computers, or telephones.

A Logical Extension

Given the similarity in the way home security systems and home automation systems operate, home automation systems are a natural extension to the product and services offerings of forward-thinking security dealers and installers. The business line extension is a natural one for many reasons:

Supplier relationships are apt to remain in tact since security systems suppliers are increasingly stocking home automation systems as the rate of diffusion of these systems increases.

The market for home control systems

is growing, and holds significant opportunity for those who wish to obtain their electrician's license and expand into the home automation field. Home control systems are the next logical level of sell-up from basic security systems.

Many home control systems product manufacturers offer comprehensive product and application training for installers, contractors and distributors to support entry into this market niche.

With their automated lighting features, home control systems are the perfect complement to stand-alone security systems, interfacing with these systems to flash lights ON and OFF and ALL LIGHTS ON when the security alarm is triggered.

Selling Features for Homeowners

Police departments across the country have long recognized lighting as the single best deterrent to crime. Automated outdoor lighting systems can remove the cover of darkness from exterior grounds to deter would-be intruders. These systems offer motion detectors that can signal interior and exterior lighting to turn ON

whenever motion is detected outdoors. This provides an extra measure of safety for homeowners. Another lighting security feature of a home automation system is the ALL LIGHTS ON feature. This serves the function of a panic button that can be activated using a handheld remote or wall-mounted controller. These features of a home control system can work in tandem with a stand-alone security system to provide additional safety benefits throughout the home.

Beyond the safety and security benefits, home control systems add numerous conveniences like controlling lighting inside and outside the home, from a handheld transmitter. Lawn sprinklers and holiday lighting can be conveniently switched ON and OFF to comply with town restrictions or energy management objectives. Homeowners can automatically draw the drapes and dim or turn OFF lighting to create a comfortable setting for viewing a favorite movie or watching television. With automated control of pool filter pumps, a clean, sparkling pool can be enjoyed anytime.

The cost-savings benefits of automated lighting and appliance control is also a significant concern to homeowners. As oil prices continually rise to over \$50 and \$60 a barrel, homeowners will seek ways to reduce their energy and fuel consumption. Through home automation, they can benefit from HVAC systems that are activated to coincide with actual occupancy. Appliances, such as washing machines, dryers, dishwashers, exhaust fans and pool pumps can be programmed to cycle ON during off-peak usage periods and other systems can be run when energy rates are lowest.

Recognizing these market trends, an increasing number of homebuilders and security dealers are forming alliances that make security systems part of the basic home design process, with wiring systems that integrate security and home automation into expandable features of the home. □

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