



## Home base

As baby boomers age, smart-home tech adoption grows

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BY [Patricia Resende](#)

The shades are drawn for you, your coffee is already brewed, and the morning news lights up all of the flat screens in the house -- before you've even emerged from the bedroom.

Welcome to the "smart" home. Companies for two decades have been working feverishly to bring smart appliances and home automation to market. The efforts, so far slow to pay off, appear to be gaining market traction among high-end developers and an aging homeowner market.

"The market for smart homes has been discussed for 20 years and a lot of companies have put a lot of money into it," said Joe Lautner, vice president of sales and marketing at HomeLogic LLC in Marblehead. HomeLogic develops and integrates hardware and software products to control most functions in the home such as security, climate control, lighting, video surveillance, irrigation, and shade control as part of a single system.

"Hundreds of millions of dollars have been poured into it and companies have lost hundreds of millions of dollars," said Lautner.

Home builders have been slow to adopt the technology, but as new home construction slows down, developers are finding value in offering it as a selling point. And consumers are beginning to ask for this type of "convenience" technology.

Conservation-minded and tech-savvy homeowners alike are now showing an interest in the convenience and eventual cost savings that can be delivered via home automation.

For instance, Ed Hennessey, a home technology integrator and dealer of Home-Logic technology, uses the system to do things like program the thermostat inside his home to drop in temperature at night and come back up before he steps out of bed in the morning.

Hennessey installed the smart technology inside the condominiums at ParkGlen, a luxury adult community development in New Milford, Conn.

HomeLogic's Lautner said the technology also delivers homeowners piece of mind via remote access to their homes. For instance, a homeowner can remotely tap into a surveillance system while she's away to check on pipes in the basement during particularly cold snaps of winter weather.

The security and safety features of the smart home, said Lautner, are the biggest selling points.

"It's not bleeding edge anymore," Lautner said. "It's cutting edge."

Builders are paying between \$10,000 and \$200,000 to install home automation systems, depending on the sophistication and number of features. And while pricey, new to mainstream consumers and still in development, analysts are predicting steady growth.

The North American home-automation market is realizing steady growth rates and has huge potential in the middle range of homes and retrofits, according to a January report by Frost & Sullivan. The group also forecasts a 9.8 percent annual growth rate between now and 2012, with revenue expected to double to \$2.44 billion during that time frame, from a total of \$1.27 billion last year.



Janice Kushner, a resident of The Boston Home, a nonprofit nursing-care facility for 96 adults with physical disabilities, is helped by a physical therapist on the Moto Med cycle, which moves her arms and can detect spasms.

In addition to luxury homes, say developers, smart-home technology can be particularly beneficial to seniors.

"If the technology is used correctly, it can simplify things," Lautner said.

HomeLogic is not yet targeting senior living or home health care but business development executives are speaking with executives of companies that provide remote health monitoring and telemedicine.

Assistive home technology for seniors or disabled individuals is a growing market. At The Boston Home, a nonprofit nursing care facility for 96 adults with physical disabilities, residents are using home automation technology to make their lives easier.

Nearly 30 wheelchairs have been equipped with wireless technology at The Boston Home. Features include a signal that can be sent to open elevator doors from as far back as 11 feet.

In addition, 10 new rooms at the home are being equipped with remote-control technology including thermostat, lights, radios and televisions. The equipment plugs into sensors that are plugged into electrical outlets. Residents' wireless remotes then send a signal to the sensors. The remote, according to The Boston Home, can be hand, voice or chin activated.

"They are wired for X10," said Don Fredette, adaptive equipment specialist at The Boston Home, about the rooms.

X10 is considered a veteran technology in home automation and is behind home automation products for GE Co., RCA, IBM Corp., Philips Electronics Ltd., Magnavox and several other consumer electronic giants.

The cost of a home automation system for residents of specialized health care organizations such as the one at The Boston Home is still high.

"On average, a system is about \$8,000 to \$10,000," said Fredette.

Unfortunately, it's not a growing trend in independent care facilities to have these systems. It is a niche market in a sense for manufacturers, he added "So, it is not likely they are selling millions of these systems, like they are selling Honda Civics."

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