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Developers using technology to stand out

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by Emma Sorensen

Smart home technology has become the latest battleground for developers looking to get the edge in an increasingly tough residential property market.

Like a designer kitchen and bathroom, home technology is something that buyers

now expect in an upmarket new home, and developers are quickly adding it to their sales pitch.

We spoke to [The Longton Property Group](#) about the technology they're including in their new apartments.

A trio of technological innovations

Longton's new off-the-plan apartments in Sydney will each be furnished with an iPad3 equipped with home automation software, a residents' only social media platform and the company's iButler app.

The technology will come to life in a building of 120 units in Sydney's Roseville scheduled for completion at the end of 2015. Two larger buildings in Mascot will follow.

There's no doubt that technology adds value to a development, but Longton's Managing Director Steven Yu says he can't put a figure or value on it, because the technology is just one component of a larger lifestyle package.

"We're using Italian tiles, European kitchen appliances, landscaping that includes pools and rooftop gardens, and iPads. It's a complete package and technology is one part of it," he explains.

"People have come to us saying they want us to introduce technology into their dwellings and lives."

And Yu says it's all sorts of buyers expressing interest in the technology – from young to old.

Innovation in living

The first component of Longton's smart home technology is a home automation system that includes the typical package of one touch wireless controlled lights, curtains, temperature, appliances, movies and music.

"People are often intimidated because they think it's too expensive and hard to use," Yu says. "We've done the research and we've made it reliable and easy to use and easy to maintain."

Even though they are in the business of developing and selling units, Yu says Longton's involvement won't end when the resident moves in. A dedicated research and development team is already working behind the scenes on technological innovation – which will inevitably lead to updates and modifications – and a customer service team will help residents use the technology.



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But the company is really attempting to step ahead of the pack and differentiate themselves when it comes to their iCommunity social network and iButler.

Connecting neighbours

The iCommunity Network is a dedicated community social media platform for each Longton apartment complex, which uses Twitter and its Chinese sister, Weibo, to create a virtual neighbourhood. The social media network will deliver daily updates on weather, news, sports, finance and cinema session times, as well as messages from residents regarding neighbourhood events (like BBQs, birthdays, catch ups), community initiatives (sports or groups) and a classified advertisements section.

Yu says the social media package will be administered by Longton and aims to reduce the isolation that can be common amongst high density residents, building community and connecting neighbours.

"We will sign up the individual residents and we will have a master Twitter account," he says. "When the residents tweet the platform will show them online and on screens in the foyer and the lift in the building's community areas."



Integrated service

The iButler system is a goods and services platform and, as its name suggests, is a little bit like having a virtual butler.

The system is a custom app which allows residents to arrange groceries, dry cleaning, home cleaning, chiropractic and massage sessions, babysitting and car washing. Goods are then delivered to the resident's own security locker.

"You have a calendar view and you can book any services through that," says Steven.

iButler is best explained by Longton's rather cute video of an animated Steven showing life before and after the service.

Inspired by Asia

Longton says it has taken a lot of its inspiration from China. Steven Yu says many of his prospective buyers feel Australia lags behind developments in Asia in terms of incorporating services and technology for residents. He says Asia is more service oriented.

"In Asia there's a lot of home delivery," Yu explains. "This ties into our iButler system."

"In China, most of the residents of an apartment building will have local lists for service providers, who deliver to their apartments."

Yu acknowledges that that labour is cheaper in Asia, and living in apartment buildings is the norm rather the exception, but it's also more common that a residential building offers such services to residents. He's hoping the trend will take off here.

Longton is carefully vetting prospective service providers with a point system. "We do a lot of due diligence for the services," says Yu. "We get the providers willing to provide the service, and they have a vested interest in the services."

If the residents use iButler as Yu intends, the ripple effect of the technology would be felt by the service providers and the savings could be passed onto residents. As Yu says, "my chiropractor is excited from a services point of view - if he can line up enough visits at Longton he can reduce his office rent, do house visits, store his equipment on site, and charge less to the clients."

Enhancing the user experience

Technology has infiltrated all aspects of our lives - from working to eating, communicating and shopping. Astute property developers are realising that smart technology integration might be a way they can differentiate themselves in a competitive market. Property technologists Meld Strategies **look at it as** enhancing the "user experience" a dwelling as you would any other device - though closer to home.

Read more about hot smart home technology ideas in our article: [Get smart: Trends to make your home more efficient in 2013](#)



*Emma Sorensen is a writer and editor who has published on topics as diverse as the arts, medicine, online classifieds, and property. The former Editor of Property Portal Watch, she now runs a boutique agency, **Antelope Media**.*

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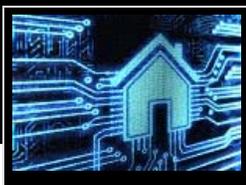
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