

# High-tech home in sight

Home automation is now within ready reach of everyday consumers, writes **Jenneth Orantia**

If you have a smartphone or tablet and a wireless network, you're already halfway there to turning your home into something out of *The Jetsons*.

All you need now are the "smart" gadgets that will transform your humble abode into a high-tech hacienda.

There's no need to spend big. The Belkin WeMo Switch (\$59.95) is a low-cost solution that lets you turn any of your appliances on and off using a free iPhone or Android app, even when you're out of the house.

You can control appliances manually or on a timer. You can also combine the Switch with the WeMo Motion (\$119 for the Switch + Motion together) to turn your appliances on and off, based on motion detection.

The most powerful way to use the Belkin WeMo system, though, is by connecting it to the free IFTTT (If, This, Then That) service, which lets you set up triggers and actions that revolve around various online services. You can, for instance, get your fan to switch on whenever the humidity level reaches a certain temperature.

You could also set up your living-room lamp to turn on whenever the sun sets, or whenever you check in at home using Foursquare. The new WeMo Light Switch (\$69.95 each) allows you to control all your household lights on your smartphone with the WeMo app.

There are even smarter ways to operate your lighting if you're happy to pay a little extra. The Philips Hue Connected Bulb - Starter Pack (\$249.95) is quite possibly the most expensive three-pack of light bulbs in history, but it comes with a wireless bridge that connects them to your wireless network.

You can do a lot more with these big-ticket bulbs

**Sophisticated: Doorbot doorbell surveillance system.**



Advanced: Artist's impressions of the Avanta high-tech apartments in Mascot, due for completion in 2015.

than simply switch them on and off.

Using the Hue app (available for Apple iOS and Android), you can adjust the colours and brightness for each individual bulb (the entire rainbow is at your disposal), set them to turn on and off on a schedule, and have them turn off automatically whenever you leave the house with your smartphone. You can also preset "scenes" for your lighting to match your mood, or base the lighting scheme on one of your photos.

You can also inject your front doorbell with a hefty dose of smarts by hooking it up to the Doorbot (SUS199). This nifty device turns your analog doorbell into a

sophisticated surveillance system, complete with a live video feed that you can check on your smartphone to see who's come knocking.

If you combine the Doorbot with the Lockitron (US\$179) - a device that fits over your existing deadbolt - you can also let people into your house remotely, have the door automatically unlock whenever you approach, and get notifications whenever your front door is opened. Both the Doorbot and the Lockitron can be installed and set up in minutes.

If you're in the market for a new home, however, you may want to skip a piecemeal solution in favour of a house or apartment that's pre-fitted with the latest in home automation. The advantage of this approach is that everything can be controlled from a single app on your smartphone or tablet.

The new Avanta serviced apartment block in Mascot, which is scheduled to be completed in two years, fashions itself as the most

high-tech housing in Australia. Each apartment comes with an iPad that lets you control all of the home automation functionality, such as opening and closing the blinds, controlling the lighting and appliances, and setting a favourite song to play as soon as you get home.

The piece de resistance, however, is the virtual butler service called iButler. From the same app on your iPad, you can order goods and services from pre-vetted providers such as drycleaners, car washers and online groceries without needing to be physically present at home. Goods that need to be dropped off are stored in an intelligent on-site locker, which includes a refrigerated compartment for groceries, and this sends you a text message whenever something is deposited. Service providers such as cleaners and babysitters can also be given temporary access to your home using the wireless entry system.

Everything can be controlled from a single app on your smartphone.

But this sort of home automation doesn't come cheap. Apartments start at \$499,000 for a one-bedroom unit, and go up to \$1.49 million for a four-bedroom penthouse.



Low-cost: Belkin WeMo Switch.

## SCREEN PLAY

**Jason Hill**

Xbox One. Price: \$599.95

Although it's been eight years since Microsoft first released the Xbox 360, don't expect to be blown away by its successor. Instead, the new Xbox One console offers a series of smart refinements and enhancements.

Microsoft wants Xbox One to be the only machine you need underneath the television, taking over your lounge room by stealth. It's a powerful games machine, has a Blu-Ray drive for watching films, offers downloadable movies, television and music, plus plenty of additional applications like Skype, Internet Explorer and video editing. Multi-tasking is supported.

The omnipresent Kinect sensor automatically recognises users when they turn on the console and enables users to control many features with voice commands.

Those that don't want to bark instructions or fail their arms need not fret: the Xbox One controller is comfortable and precise. Its many enhancements include

improved thumbsticks and triggers that independently rumble to increase sensory feedback.

Xbox One is estimated to be 10 times more powerful than its predecessor, yet most launch games wouldn't look out of place on the 360. Keen gamers know it always takes developers time to get to grips with new hardware. They also know that there's little to separate the Xbox One hardware with Sony's PlayStation 4 (out next week) and *Forza Motorsport 5* is the standout launch title, a comprehensive driving simulation catering equally to casual Sunday drivers and the most dedicated petrol headonists. Hurting around Bathurst's Mount Panorama is thrilling stuff. *Dead Rising 3* and *Ryse: Son of Rome* are also visually pleasing, although seem shallow in comparison.

You can also play next-generation versions of many quality games recently released on 360, including *Assassin's Creed IV: Call of Duty: Ghosts*, *Battlefield 4*, *FIFA 14* and *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*.

There is no backward compatibility with 360 games, but existing Xbox Live accounts seamlessly carry over to the new machine.

## TOSS-UP

Which glasses are best for watching 3D television?

**Active 3D glasses**

from \$29.95 a pair

**Passive 3D glasses**

from \$5 a pair

Watching 3DTV requires wearing special glasses, but not all 3D glasses are the same.

Some 3DTVs require battery-powered "Active" 3D glasses. Each lens is a tiny LCD screen, with one lens turning black while the television displays the image for the other eye. This happens so quickly that you don't notice it, at least in theory, although it makes some people motion sick.

Meanwhile "Passive" 3DTVs simply rely on special sunglasses which use different polarisation patterns to let different images through for your left and right eye. They're the same as the 3D glasses you wear in the cinema and your cinema-bought pair should work with your Passive 3DTV.

Plasma televisions are only available with

## VERDICT

Active 3D glasses have improved in the last few years, but most people are still likely to appreciate the benefits of Passive 3D much more than they're likely to notice any drop in picture quality.

Active 3D, but LCD televisions can work with either technology. The downside of Passive 3D is that the picture resolution is reduced in order to display the image for both eyes at once. Most people won't notice the difference, but the extra resolution offered by new Ultra HD televisions helps improve the Passive 3D image.

The downside of Active 3D is that the glasses are heavier and more expensive, although they're improved in both aspects over the last few years. You still need to hold down the power button on the glasses and wait for them to connect to the television. If you look away from the television to talk to someone, you might need to wait a few seconds for the glasses to reconnect when you look back at the television. With Active 3D you're also more likely to notice ghosting - when one eye sees something meant for the other - although this varies depending on the make and model of the television.

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