

Sustainability by design: smart home technologies

Will Hopkins, a social entrepreneur, legal scholar, and a director at Your Smart Home, sets out the value of designing smart home technology into each development

In the closing years of her life Mother Teresa reflected on her work, acknowledging that it “was just a drop in the ocean”. However, she continued with: “But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something.” This rather poignant testimony to her valuable work sets the scene for how we should establish long-term sustainability.

In the trade we are forever bombarded with large-scale government and industry strategies for sustainability and cost savings, but let us not forget that each of these only constitute one part of an ocean made up of many drops, each of which can make a valuable contribution.

If we are to wholly embrace

sustainability for the duration, then grand schemes and ideas must be translated to even the smallest of developments, be that the domestic home, the office development, or the hotel and leisure complex. The use of smart home technologies provides the perfect platform for the delivery of life-time cost savings through sustainability.

“A common feature of all systems today is the all-off button”

Home control

Smart home technologies are not new; most modern properties contain some form of automation. Thermostatically controlled central heating is a basic example with obvious energy saving benefits. The new buzz word of “home control” represents the next step in the process, through the creation of intelligent homes. Indeed, while labeled “home” control, the same technology and systems apply to both the commercial and industrial sectors too.

The scope of these intelligent smart

homes is rather broad, from automatic bathing solutions controlled via your iPhone, to mood lighting and home cinemas. These are generally things that the end user requires. Whilst each of them may carry energy saving characteristics, it is not here where the true sustainability of intelligent home design comes in.

Smart home sustainability lies in the backbone of home control. One supplier puts it like this: “Think of an electrical installation that simplifies your life. An installation that gives you full access to your home. One that makes your home safer and monitors your energy consumption with just one touch of a button, allowing you to take good care of your family, yourself, your budget, and the environment.”

It is this basic change to electrical installations that can make the biggest difference. One can make the comparison between our homes and cars - another area where economy is crucial. If we look at cars over the last 20 years, the technology has moved on massively; ABS, power steering, climate control etc. Our cars are used for commuting in, not living in (though it may seem that way to some). It seems strange that our homes, the places where we live with our families, have not undergone the same improvement.

Sustainability through design

Sustainability does not have to involve compromise. Smart homes are primarily based around users’ needs and wants, though this has not precluded many

Niko Home Control

Niko Home Control is the First installation with which families can monitor and actively Reduce their energy consumption at home. With Niko Home Control, residents control The installation centrally using a smartphone or touch screen whilst enjoying a more secure and comfortable lifestyle.



green aspects. Take, for instance, a basic lighting system in a smart home. This system is likely to have many user-friendly features such as illuminated keypads and iPhone-based control. However, the mood lighting features that it offers instantly reduce energy consumption. Much of the system would likely be based on low energy lighting, in some cases using LEDs. Moreover, a common feature of all systems today is the “all-off button”. Appearing both on keypads and iPhones, it enables the user to instantly turn off all lights in the house. Those readers with teenage children will instantly see the utility of such a feature.

Furthermore, with all systems going through a control module, it enables the easy monitoring of energy consumption and supply, so end users can see both what they are using and what they are feeding back in to the grid (if they have a solar installation, for example.) This can be presented on a simple display in the house that details consumption in cost terms and allows year-on-year comparison.

By including smart home technologies in the design of our projects, we ensure that each of the drops can make a valuable contribution in the ocean of sustainability.

Your Smart Home

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