

Smart-home tech goes beyond novelty

DIGITAL from H1

“It empowers people to do four things: Control, communication, security and access of their home or condo.”

“It’s also scalable, so you can add other devices and features as they develop.”

In Korea, Samsung and others have been demonstrating high-level advanced automation systems with wall-sized screens driven by hand gesture technology, similar to that used by Xbox Kinect.

Among the features in development are the overlay of touch screens on almost any hard surface, such as a kitchen cabinet door, fridge or bathroom mirror. It’s a step along the road of the “Internet of Things” in which coffee makers and fridges, washing machines and dryers are all interconnected.

The automation systems are designed to work with smart appliances for the best possible results — programmed, for example, to operate when electricity costs are lowest.

Paul Brannen, Samsung Canada senior vice-president of mobile and enterprise, said the first steps toward a smart home in Canada will begin with educating consumers.

Part of their strategy is to work with builders, such as Canderel and the YC Condos project.



YC CONDOS

Smart-home systems coming to YC Condos’ penthouses will enable owners to unlock the front door and adjust the blinds, lights and temperature from their smartphones.

“It’s really interesting to see what they’ve done in Asia,” he says, noting the highrise market in Toronto is booming and along with it a strong sense this is the right time and opportunity for the technology.

Big-box retailers, like Best Buy, also have an eye on the market with a division dedicated to installing and servicing smart home devices.

Later this month, Home Depot will preview an automated home system

by WINK which will connect several devices, right down to an egg container that will track the eggs in your fridge and send an alert to your phone if you’re running low.

It’ll also connect smart door locks,

irrigation systems, HVAC, thermostats and blinds.

Smart-home technology has been around for years, but the convergence of computing power in wireless devices, and the ability to manufacture appliances with processing power and connectivity at little initial cost, is creating a huge market.

Showing homeowners the value of an automated and remote-controlled space is where Samsung and others are now focused. The technology, though, goes beyond novelty, says Brannen: “We’re energy-rich in North America but we could all still save some money on our hydro bills.”

Home security and monitoring also ranks high with homeowners, as does the desire to have more control on the fly in a time-challenged world, he adds.

Dhanji says Asia has rapidly adopted the technology to the extent that toilets, which perform urinalysis — checking on proteins and sugar — are available.

“It’s a way off yet in North America but we’re just starting,” he says, noting Samsung’s Smart Home technology will soon be installed in YC Condos sales office.

“The sale experience will be fantastic,” he says. “You walk in and staff hand you a phone, and you’ll be able to turn up the stereo, close the blinds, see the camera in action.”



Bryan Tuckey

Upgrades are key factor in our economy

Canadians love their home improvement projects.

We’ve experienced an amazing 15 consecutive years of annual spending increases on home improvements, according to a recent housing report by Altus Group, a Toronto-based global real estate consultant.

Among the factors for the climb are: a growing stock of aging homes; changing consumer preferences; and a big increase in media exposure of home renovations and the industry.

Another factor, especially for the GTA, is a lack of land supply which has been driving up prices for ground-related housing. That has led homeowners and renters to stay in their homes and renovate.

The Altus report said that the rise in reno spending will continue, and noted it expects about 3 per cent growth for this year and 2015, both nationally and in Ontario.

During the past five years, the average annual renovation cost per occupied housing unit (rental and owned homes) was about \$4,600 a year, up from \$2,500 between 1994 and 1998.

About \$63.4 billion was spent nationally in the residential renovation industry last year. That’s more than was spent across Canada on new residential construction. In fact, that figure represents about 3.7 per cent of total gross domestic product.

Renovations can add value to a home when they’re made by the right professional. We recommend that you visit renomark.ca, where you will find Canada’s top contractors.

Founded by BILD in 2001, RenoMark is a program that was designed to bring professionalism and integrity to the renovation industry. Each RenoMark contractor agrees to abide by a renovation-specific code of conduct and a code of ethics. The program is in nine provinces and more than 40 communities across Canada, and there are about 200 RenoMark renovators, trade contractors and custom builders across the GTA.

As well as providing a written contract, RenoMark renovators must return all phone calls within two business days; offer a minimum two-year warranty on all work; carry a minimum of \$2 million in liability insurance; and provide a detailed written contract or scope of work for all jobs.

Use renomark.ca’s searchable database by region and type of project. In addition, check out the website’s RenoGuide list for helpful tips. Bryan Tuckey is president and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association. Follow him on Twitter at @bildgta, facebook.com/bildgta and bildblogs.ca.

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