

2014: The Year Everything Changed in Home Automation

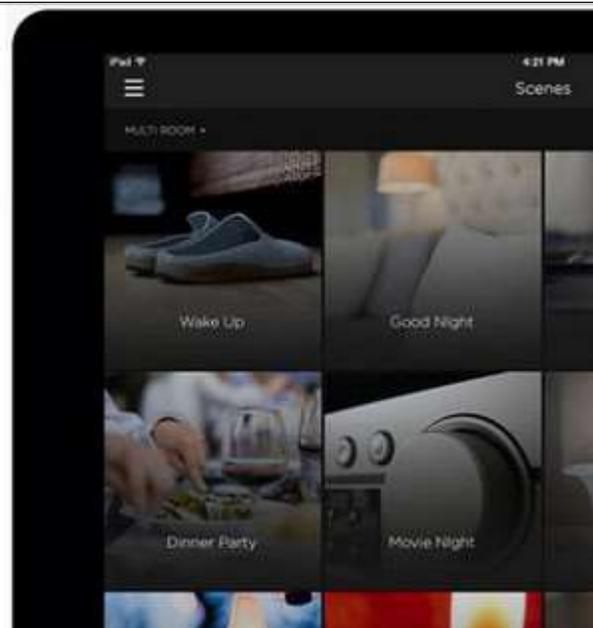
Higher-end home automation comes down-market and DIY-friendly. It's about time.

Home automation, 2014 and beyond
By Julie Jacobson, October 24, 2014

After 20 years of covering home automation, for the first time I can declare, “This is the year everything changed.”

We know that is the case for the mass market, but now we have sea changes in the custom-installation channel after 20 years of tradition – a tradition that includes highly paid programmers, expensive hardware, time-consuming installations, long waits for integration drivers, money-sapping truck rolls and other nuisances that have kept home control out of reach for most consumers and unprofitable for many integrators.

The worst legacy of custom-installed home automation is the exclusion of customers from the very systems they purchased – the higher the cost of the system, the more “locked out” the customer.



Add an extra light to a scene? That'll be \$200 ma'am.

Most of these challenges are simply reflections of the technology of the time and the immense R&D that went into developing new categories of product.

But that last thing ... the thing about locking customers out of their systems? That one was part technological, part philosophical. The theory was: dealers can make more money if they charge for every little change or charged a recurring fee for ongoing service.

Of course that never really happened. Either dealers never charged because “the customer already spent enough on their system,” or else customers unplugged their rack and abandoned home technology altogether because they were tired of calling their installers.

Well, technology has caught up to a category that “we” pioneered. At the same time, market dynamics have spurred home-control vendors and installers to change their products and their ways of doing business.

At [CEDIA EXPO 2014](#) virtually every home-control vendor demonstrated business-changing products and services that reduce costs, enrich the customer experience and (I firmly believe) increase profit potential for integrators.

Virtually all of the higher-end manufacturers launched new platforms that start with relatively inexpensive hubs and dramatically simplified programming. Control4, for example, says its Composer Express can shave 70 percent off installation time ... and a lot of expense usually required for experienced programmers. Crestron’s Pyng is so simple a technician can install and program a basic home automation system using nothing more than an iPad.

Both Crestron and Savant – which have never looked kindly to customer tinkering – are now letting end users change and add scenes, and perform other simple tasks usually relegated to professional programmers (Control4 has allowed it for years). Ditto for Lutron on the lighting, thermostat and shading front, and Clare Controls on the everything front. While end users previously could rearrange their UIs through Clare, now they can do some configuring as well. (Lots of good story links below.)

And for the next step: more, more, more! We expect more pro-centric home-control vendors to take a cue from ADT, which now allows consumers to write [if/then scenes for ADT Pulse](#) via the cloud service IFTTT. The more engaged the client, the more likely they are to maintain their system and keep coming back for more.

Meanwhile, formerly DIY-centric automation providers such as iRule and Revolv are now relying heavily on the pro channel. iRule acquired OEM customer On Controls last year as a platform for the channel; Revolv is aggressively courting pros for its \$399 DIY solution.

Brace yourself for a new way of doing business.