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Home Automation Is a Smart Path to Going Green



By Dan Fulmer
FulTech Solutions, Inc.

With "green" now such a big buzz word in the industry and home owners becoming more interested in improving home efficiency, builders and remodelers should consider home automation features for their customers, if they haven't already.

Home automation companies and systems have been making homes greener, almost by accident, for nearly a decade.

Builders and remodelers should talk to electronic systems contractors (ESCs) and integrators about home automation systems and energy management. You will be surprised at just how much money you could save your customers and how much convenience you can

add to their lifestyle by offering home technologies and automated systems.

Energy Savings of 25% or More

Controlling the lights, HVAC systems, water heaters and even drapes and blinds can save home owners as much as 25% or more in electricity consumption. There are several ways to achieve this savings.

First, by controlling two of the largest energy consumers in the home — HVAC and water heaters — you can cut usage by 15% to 20% (sometimes more).

HVAC Systems. Many new homes have two or more HVAC systems, each designed to heat and condition different zones in the house. While some home owners with these systems save energy by only controlling when the systems are on or off, additional energy savings can be achieved by comfortably cooling or heating those zones that are occupied and maintaining energy-saving conditions in the unoccupied zones like second-floor guest room areas, for instance.

Water Heaters. Electric water heaters are also major energy users (unlike on-demand and gas water heaters, which are more efficient).

Electric water heaters



Electronic Systems Contractor installing structured wiring.

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can be switched off for days when homes are unoccupied, but they require too much time and energy to reheat the water, so turning them on and off during the day is not energy-efficient.

Solar water heaters are a no-brainer today. These systems have no fuel costs at all, and home owners may be able to recoup the cost of the systems in as little as three years. These costs are also in line with on-demand and gas systems.

Drape and Blind Controls. Combining drape and blind controls with HVAC control — especially in homes with many windows or east and southeast facing windows — can significantly reduce unwanted heat gain and HVAC cycling in “hot zones” of the house caused by sun exposure. Minimizing heat this way decreases HVAC usage and maximizes savings for the home owner.

Lighting. Lighting generally accounts for 10% to 20% of the home's total electrical usage, but controlling lighting in large homes, or homes that have many lighting fixtures, can save a substantial amount of energy.

Typically, a lighting control system (including many dimmer systems) can turn on and off at preset dim levels.

Dimming lights can result in energy savings of nearly one-to-one. Dimming a light by 50%, for instance, saves roughly 40% of the wattage. The remaining 10% is wasted heat. So home owners with a houseful of 60- to 100-watt light bulbs can achieve substantial savings with a dimming system.

Once our customers have used their dimmer systems, they rarely turn their lights on to full illumination.

LED lighting that uses only 5% of the energy of normal bulbs can also bring home owners substantial energy savings. These systems have been improved to the point where they are achieving the quality, quantity and color of lighting that most home owners want.



A living room with automated shades.

Now, all these systems may seem like they are complicated to set up, install and program — and to those who don't work with these systems

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daily, they can be. So, those tasks are best left to ESCs to handle.

Once these systems are properly in place, however, they are easy and intuitive to use, and mostly automatic — enabling home owners to realize substantial energy savings without having to become familiar with the intricacies of energy management.

Builders also should consider arranging for ESCs to have separate service contracts with their customers. Because ESCs have the knowledge and experience to answer customers' questions and meet their needs, such an alliance should lessen technology service worries for builders and improve customer service.

Achieving Second-Home Energy Savings Remotely

One final point. Home automation systems can help second home buyers reduce and control their energy consumption and enhance their lifestyle comfort remotely — not a bad selling point for the systems or the homes.

With these systems, home owners can turn on water heaters and HVAC systems, have the house shutters and shades opened, the lights on and the house ready for their arrival by activating them by cell phone or computer. The home can be ready and waiting, as if they never left.

None of this technology is new. Companies like mine have been connecting and installing these "green" features for nearly 15 years.

Dan Fulmer is president and founder of [FulTech Solutions](#), a home technology installation firm headquartered in Jacksonville, Fla., and the [College of Smart](#), a dealer licensing and training program. A nationally recognized expert and speaker in home automation, his company was awarded two 2006 [CEA Mark of Excellence awards](#), the 2007 NAHB Innovative Housing Award and CEPro magazine's Best of the Best Dealers. An NAHB member, Fulmer serves on the [Home Technology Alliance](#). For more information, e-mail Fulmer at [FulTech Solutions](#) or call him at 904-992-6624; or visit [www.fultechsolutions.com](#).

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Information About Home Technology Available From HTA



The [Home Technology Alliance](#) (HTA) is a partnership between NAHB and the [Custom Electronic Design Installation Association](#) (CEDIA) that was formed to position the housing industry to effectively meet the growing home buyer demand for home technology and provide maximum return on investment in the new home building and remodeling process.

For more information, visit [www.nahb.org/HTA](#).

CEDIA: A Source for Experienced ESCs

The [Custom Electronic Design Installation Association](#) (CEDIA) is a founding sponsor in the Home Technology Alliance and an international trade association of companies that specialize in designing and installing electronic systems for the home.



CEDIA members are established and insured businesses with bona fide qualifications and experience in this field. CEDIA serves as a source for [Electronic Systems Contractors](#) (ESCs).

For more information on CEDIA, visit the association's Web site at

[Calendar of Events](#)

[NAHB Career Center](#)

www.cedia.org. To find an ESC, [click here](#).

Attend the Green Building Conference in New Orleans



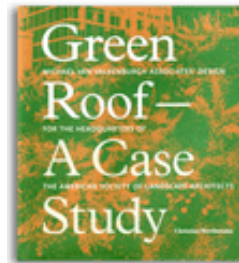
Register now for the [2008 National Green Building Conference](#), held May 11-13 in New Orleans. Get contacts, tools and ideas that are good for both the environment and your bottom line.

The National Green Building Conference is the only national conference targeted to green building for the mainstream residential building industry. Network with designers and suppliers, attend exceptional education sessions and develop the skills you need for profitable green building.

For information and to register, visit www.nahb.org/greenbuildingconference, call 800-368-5242 x8338 or e-mail registrar@nahb.com.

'Green Roof — A Case Study' Delves Into Green Roof Construction

A green roof that combines aesthetics and mechanics has become the goal of many landscape architects. In "[Green Roof — A Case Study](#)," available at BuilderBooks.com, author Christian Werthmann explains the history, methodology and design process of green roof garden construction — providing a rich source of inspiration and technical knowledge in the process for anybody interested in this solution to many of the environmental challenges faced today.



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