

The Converged Home

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Changes in behaviour, not new technology, are making our homes more connected than ever.

Allow me to take you back to the turn of the millennium. In 2000, the idea that a refrigerator might connect to the internet was widely seen as a joke. For many, it was a sign that technologists had watched too many episodes of Star Trek and failed to consider the benefit to our everyday lives.

Fast-forward to the present, and all major domestic white goods manufacturers are producing connected devices that can make our homes more intelligent and efficient. So what has changed? It's not just the technology: it's also our attitudes toward these cutting-edge devices and their capabilities.

Health and energy reduction are driving connections

Consumer focus on personal health will play a major role in creating the connected home. Bathroom scales, electronic forks and refrigerators that assess calorie intake, monitor weight and assess eating habits are already available. Also on the market are passive self-tracking devices such as Jawbone, Fitbit and Nike FuelBand. Today, nearly 20% of US smartphone owners already use an app to manage or track their health, and there are more than 40,000 health apps worldwide. Can implanted devices be far behind? Technology-enhanced products also get a boost in areas where consumers seek cost reductions.

Connected light bulbs and thermostats, along with washing machines that optimize water usage, for example, help consumers cut their energy bills. Lighting can detect when a person is going to sleep, and HVAC can optimize output by directing air to a specific room (or even a location inside a room).

Convergence of business and leisure

Perhaps the biggest area of convergence is the merging of work and leisure, or “bleisure.” According to Britain on the Move, working while commuting or enjoying the comforts of home has added an extra £9bn to the UK economy. This is forcing us to re-engineer our residences so we have space to work and connections to all the services we need to be truly productive. We want our homes to function more like offices, but we also want our offices to be more like our homes. Perhaps the biggest change already driven by bleisure is that a decreasing number of individuals now carry separate work and personal mobile phones.

And how about work + pleasure on the go? Products such as Slingbox and Roku allow consumers to stream content to their devices of choice, ensuring that viewers never miss their favorite shows again.

Disconnected feels dumb

The bottom line is that technology that can't be personalized now feels dumb, but there is still a long way to go. And it's not likely that we will totally re-engineer our homes, as the costs would be prohibitive. A more probable development is that we will use patches, typically apps, to bring many of the benefits of connectivity into our lives.

And it won't be long before the converged home is not just a futuristic dream but a reality.

Sources: Pew research, Research2Guidance

Consumer needs and desires that will drive adoption of the connected home:

1. Health, wellness and physical activity
2. Saving money
3. Fewer repetitive chores and more free time

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