

# HOME UPDATE

## The High-Tech Home: Improvements add comfort, convenience and security

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**N**ew developments in home technology can make your home more enjoyable, boost security and increase the appeal of your property when it comes time to sell. Here's a look at a few of the most popular trends in high-tech home improvement.

### Improving your home's infrastructure

Many homeowners today want their homes to accommodate multiple phone lines, high-speed Internet access, home automation and security systems, and entertainment services. While newly built homes are being wired to handle this capacity, these electronic systems quickly overwhelm the standard wiring found in older homes. If you're considering high-tech improvements to your home, the best foundation is upgrading to high-capacity wiring. The current residential standard is the cable used for computer networking, called Category 5 (Cat 5) cable. It has the ability to handle enormous amounts of data while allowing many devices to operate over the same cable simultaneously. That



### Home Pricing Guide

#### Plan the layout

Proper acoustics for your home theater are dictated in large part by the size and shape of the room. The optimum room shape is rectangular, with as few doors and windows as possible. Carpeting, upholstered furniture and heavy drapes all absorb sound and enhance your acoustics. Glass, marble and other hard surfaces should be avoided, since they reflect sound and can cause distortion. Comfy seating is a must. Some people opt for traditional theater-style chairs, while others prefer couches and loveseats.

#### Purchase your equipment

The basic elements of a home theater are a big-screen television, movie-playing equipment, speakers and a surround-sound-capable stereo receiver. The rule of thumb in home theater is that

means you can operate multiple computers, phones, home-security systems—and just about anything else you might want—all through a single cable.

In addition to bringing you added convenience, enjoyment and security, re-wiring your home for high-tech improvements also pays off when it comes time to sell. A rapidly growing number of new homes are being built with Cat 5 wiring installed. Since your home will compete with new construction for buyer attention, offering high-tech capability will help increase your home's appeal.

### **Smart home systems provide next level of convenience and safety**

Automated control systems are another leading high-tech home trend and one more way you can add value to your home. According to the Consumer Electronics Association, more than 60 percent of new homes are now being built with a network of high-speed data, voice and HDTV-capable wiring that's routed invisibly through walls and ceilings to a central control panel. For as little as several thousand dollars, these systems allow you to monitor and manage your home by the push of a button. And since the systems are digital, you can remotely operate your lights, heating, air-conditioning and even your oven from work or on the road via a personal computer or pocket PC.

Automated home-security systems make

you get what you pay for. The cost to put together a system starts at around \$4,000 and can go up significantly from there depending on the size of the screen, quality and number of speakers and other equipment. A home-theater television screen is typically 27 inches or larger. The larger the screen, the farther the distance needs to be between it and the seating area. Once your seating is laid out, you can determine the best screen size for your room.

To get a movie-theater experience, you need quality sound. Experts recommend that you don't skimp here—buy the best audio equipment that you can afford. There are several companies that make invisible speakers that are actually installed behind the wallboard, making them virtually undetectable.

Whether you're looking at purchasing a new home or upgrading your existing home, the latest advancements in home technology can enhance the safety and enjoyment of your living space. And when it comes time to sell, you can be sure that potential buyers will appreciate all the benefits your high-tech home has to offer.

### **Cutting-Edge Cool**

Here's a quick sampling of the latest developments in high-tech home conveniences:

1. Smart home systems that can be controlled by text messages sent from your cell phone. You can even monitor what is happening inside the house by real-time photos sent from your home-security cameras direct to your phone.

use of these digital networks to provide an added level of high-tech safety features. Combining security cameras, alarms and programmable locks and lighting, digital home-security systems can be customized to meet your changing needs. A number of these systems allow you to log onto a PC while you're away from home and keep tabs on pets, monitor your yard and even lock and unlock doors to accommodate home deliveries or repairs. They're an ideal security solution for second homes as well.

### **Home theaters enhance leisure time spent at home**

A recent Associated Press/AOL poll found that 73 percent of Americans prefer to stay home and watch a movie rather than go out to a movie theater. With new technology and falling prices, an increasing number of homeowners are replicating the multiplex experience with a personal home-theater system. Whether you are going to do it yourself or plan to hire a professional, here are a few points to consider.

### **Evaluate how you will use the space and identify your resources**

Your budget, your existing space and your own expertise will all help shape your final plans. Do you want to host the whole gang every week for Monday Night Football, or watch movies with your spouse? Will the space be a dedicated theater, or will you use the room for other things? How you plan to use your home theater will determine the size of space, necessary

2. A 4-inch-thick bathroom mirror with a built-in plasma TV screen that disappears when the TV is off.

3. A refrigerator with a built-in computer and barcode scanner that helps keep track of your groceries and e-mails you when you're out of milk.

4. An oven, with programmable times and temperatures, that keeps food cold during the day, then turns on the heat and cooks it for you in time for dinner.

5. An Internet-connected microwave with a built-in screen that allows you to download and display thousands of recipes.

seating and type of equipment that best meets your needs. Whether you have the luxury of building an entirely new room or are remodeling an existing area, keep in mind that audio does leak through, so consider the proximity of adjoining living spaces in your planning.