

Installers Relish Opportunity as Smart Homes Expand

Written by Nick Graves
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The entry of major technology players such as Apple, Google and Samsung to the smart homes market will drive massive growth as it becomes mainstream, was the conclusion of many speakers at the Smart Building Conference in London this week.



Smart homes have so far generally been a high-tech niche and the preserve of the rich, but as these major players jump into the market, rapid expansion and commoditisation is forecast.

While this raised a number of concerns amongst the delegates, the overriding view was that this would create many opportunities in a much larger market. For example, Daniel Knight of Fibaro UK reported that of the 12m homes in the UK, 47% of them are actively looking for smart technologies, but only around 26,000 had smart installations to date. The pattern across much of Europe is likely to be similar.

Apple's HomeKit was announced to developers in June, and provides a platform for devices in the home to integrate with each other and with iOS. Apple has also published the final Made for iPhone specifications for hardware developers, setting the scene for a rash of further announcements in this space, such as that from Elgato, with its Eve range.



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A number of major names were listed as partners by Apple in June, including Philips, iHome, Osram, Withings and Honeywell. Speaking at the Smart Building Conference, Jeremy Peterson, General Manager of Honeywell EMEA, confirmed that the company is working on HomeKit integration, but was not yet ready to make any announcements.

Apple is not the only major player looking at this growing market: Google purchased Nest, the startup created by iPod creator Tony Fadell, in February, and has followed this with the acquisition of DropCam in June. This gives the company a presence in smart thermostats, smoke detectors and security cameras, and highlights a rather different approach to that of Apple - led by devices rather than by creating a platform. Samsung has followed Google,Â's lead, swallowing up SmartThings in August.

However these strategies evolve, it is clear that the smart home market is set for expansion, and that this expansion will be through a much wider range of channels than those serving it today. These will include the utility companies, telecoms sector, as well as other domestic services suppliers such as electricians and burglar alarm technicians. Beyond this DIY self-installation is also set to expand sharply, as these major mass-market vendors surge ahead.

While many of these will be low-level single-function installations, many more will seek professional integration expertise, representing a huge growth opportunity for the custom installer.

Go [Apple HomeKit Announcement](#)

Go [Samsung Acquires SmartThings](#)

Go [Google Acquires Nest](#)

Go [Nest Acquires DropCam](#)

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Go [Fibaro UK](#)

Go [Honeywell Smarthome](#)

Go [Elgato Eve](#)