Introduction

I recently visited the home of a very successful developer who had a 'home automation system' installed in his home.

When I entered the property I immediately noticed that there were a lot of dollars pumped into this house. I knew that this would be a great installation and was excited to see the systems he used.

As I walked in I started looking for touchscreens.

Insert lighting description.

The next thing I noticed were ceiling speakers in the living areas and bedrooms. 'So you got a multi-room audio solution, too?' I asked.

The owner looked at me like I was from another planet.

When I asked how he controlled the music, he opened the joinery door in one of the rooms and showed me his A/V receiver. 'Great,' I said, 'you can control the whole house from here – the music you play here will come out in each room.'

He shook his head, 'No, I have a receiver in each room so each person can listen to their own music.'

This was starting to look less and less like a multi-room audio solution. I asked 'What if you all want to listen to the same track – where do you plug the music in?'

Ultimately, the 'solution' was to move his iPod to the relevant receiver. In other words, there was no holistic solution.

I began to wonder what type of home automation system this was. There were no centralised control touchscreens, no way to integrate the lighting and audio, and no multi-room audio.

Then came the light-bulb moment – this home was not automated. It simply had a lighting control system with some speakers.

I've spent twelve years in the home-automation business, creating 125 smart homes and working with over 400 happy customers. And I see this far too often.

Comment [J1]: How could you tell it was an expensive house? Giving some examples of the size or the landscaping or the finishes will help paint a picture for your reader

Comment [J2]: What else would you look for? I think this would be stronger if it was a list with 2-3 items, because then the reader can get a sense for just how much is missing.

Comment [J3]: Rather than giving the name of the C-BUS control system, which might not mean anything to your readers, explain what you could see. How many lights were there, where were they positioned, were any turned on so you could see them in action, were they dimmed, bright, coloured, etc.?

Think about breaking it down in the same way you broke down the audio system

Comment [J4]: Were they in each room or just in some rooms? Details help create a clearer picture

Comment [J5]: Your website said 399, but I figure you will be over 400 by the time you get to print

The average home owner today assumes a ‘smart home’ or ‘home automation’ simply means a house with a few gadgets. This often means that the trades who work on their house assume a request for automation is a whim or a way to keep up with the latest fad, and install the requested gadgets at the end of the renovation or build without considering how they could work together in a synchronised solution.

While having an intelligent lighting control system is a part of home automation, it is only one component. Likewise, while an audio system is a part of home automation, it is still just one piece of the puzzle.

The issue is that, without the complete solution, the client will find his house doesn’t work as well as he wants it to. If it isn’t convenient or efficient, then the lifestyle, security and sustainability benefits he was hoping to achieve are only available with a lot of manual work, rather than the house taking care of everything on his behalf.

Ultimately, this results in either a dissatisfied client, who isn’t going to refer his friends and family to your business, or a client who is constantly calling you after you thought the job was done to request changes, new features and help with issues.

Home automation explained

So if home automation isn’t a cool lighting or audio system, what is it?

Home automation means different things to different people. To some people it’s as simple as few speakers by the BBQ with a wireless remote, while to others it’s TV screens coming down from the ceiling when you enter the room as the lights dim and the fireplace ignites to create a romantic atmosphere when it’s cold and grey outside.

I define home automation as the coming together of many components in a home, which work together and automatically respond and adjust to external events to improve the owner’s lifestyle. These components include internet connectivity, structured cabling, lighting, security, audio, HVAC, irrigation and more. The events they respond to could be as simple as someone pressing the doorbell or the temperature rising beyond a pre-set point. In an automated home, each of these events will trigger a response, whether that’s cutting the music playing in the lounge room to announce that there’s

a visitor at the front door, or the air-conditioning or ceiling fans turning on to help cool things down.

The keys are automation and integration. Home control systems that aren't automated only offer control from a remote device that allow a home owner to switch on, adjust and take control of devices in the home. Home *automation* systems allow the ceiling fans to turn on or the blinds to close *automatically* when the temperature reaches a pre-defined point. The second element to note is that a home owner doesn't simply choose one event to trigger a response and then stop, nor does a response consist of a single device activating. In an automated home, multiple events can trigger responses, and each response may call on several devices, which will adjust according to the event. In other words, the devices are all integrated with the automation system.

Ultimately, all of this technology comes together to make life more convenient for the home owner.

The secret of all good home automation systems is the simplicity with which the technology is used. As technology improves, it plays greater role in our everyday lives – iPhones, iPads, smartphones, and faster computers are all constant accessories – but more often than not it makes life more cluttered and inconvenient than before. In a truly automated home, rather than adding clutter and noise, everything should work together with a touch of a button.

Why automate? The benefits

When a client asks you to add some functionality to their home, it often feels like a headache. Couldn't they just be happy with four walls and a roof like everyone used to be?

The truth is that, as technology develops and the idea of home automation becomes more widespread, you're going to be fending these requests more often than not.

Why? From a home owner's perspective, there are a range of benefits.

The first is convenience. Smart homes can be accessed and controlled remotely, which allows the owner to check in on the family and home while they are travelling or at work. With a few clicks on a mobile device, an

owner can bring up security cameras, adjust the temperature, unlock the doors or adjust the lighting. With the press of one button on their way out they can turn off the lights and the air-conditioning and arm the security system.

The next is peace of mind. With the power to remotely unlock the front door, a home owner doesn't need to give the cleaner a key or leave one under the mat. This gives the home owner complete control over who enters their home and peace of mind that if they change cleaners, for example, they don't have to change all the locks. An integrated system will also offer intrusion detection features to protect a home from theft as well as protecting the home from the dangers of fire, flooding and electrocution.

A third benefit is energy management. Managing energy consumption and reducing wastage has been a hot topic for many years now and will continue to be a major struggle for many home owners as time moves on. In recent years there has been an increase in the amount of electronic devices that have formed part of our everyday routines in and around the home. When I was growing up we had one TV in the lounge room and now it's not uncommon to have one in each room. I don't think I have seen a home recently that doesn't have a microwave, washing machine, dryer and multiple fridges, and we can't forget about the laptops, smartphones, tablets and more, which constantly draw power even while on standby. Fortunately for today's home owner, technology can help monitor and manage usage with simple techniques like automatically switching off devices that are not in use, and using a staged approach to cool homes in summer before switching on the air-conditioning.

At this point, you might be thinking, 'Well that's all well and good for the home owner, but it's still a lot of work for us.'

This is where you're wrong.

Busting the myth of complexity

There has always been a myth among builders and tradesmen that home automation is complex and adds thousands to the cost of a new building or renovation.

Although this may be the case for some exotic and highly integrated systems, I have found that for most homes and projects it doesn't have to be complex, and it can also be very cost effective.

In fact, technology *needs* to be simple to be used effectively. Integrated systems that are complex and interfaces that are not intuitive are not warmed to by the client, creating a bad reputation for the installer and leaving a bitter taste about home automation in general, which then filters through to family and friends.

By contrast, a well-designed solution can be both simple and cost effective. And helping a client find that simply and cost-effective solution has many knock-on benefits for you, whether you're a developer or tradesman.

Comment [J6]: May need to be refined – I added developer because of the next bit, but I've been focusing on trades throughout the book

The developer's return on investment

With the introduction of the affordable housing scheme around Australia, large construction companies, developers and builders have been focusing heavily on more multi-tenant dwellings, apartments, multi-storey units and estates to offer lower cost housing to the everyday Australian.

The problem with this is that they are all based on very tight budgets to bring in the most profit, and this approach doesn't allow for future technologies and the benefits associated with them.

However, with all of these developments going up, in the not-too-distant future supply is going to overcome demand, which means prices will go down. Rather than buyers eagerly snapping up each property as soon as it comes on to the market, the same buyers will be able to leisurely compare properties to find the best deal. Soon your only option will be to undercut the prices at the development down the road.

But what if *your* development had a special feature than set it apart from all the others?

The smart-home concept is one way to make your development site stand out. It will make your units or apartments or town houses much better value for money, which means your properties spend less time on the market, and you make your profit faster.

The tradesman's return on investment

If you're a trade working on new builds or renovations, you too can experience the benefits of home automation.

What if, rather than pushing a client's enquiry about energy management or security automation to the side, you were able to give them an educated answer about their options? What if you were able to introduce them to an experienced automation consultant in the planning phase of the build?

First, your client will feel heard. They'll feel like you understand what they are trying to achieve, and that you're willing to support them in the process.

Second, if you're speaking to a potential client, you've immediately differentiated yourself from all the other trades out there who don't have a working knowledge of this technology and put it in the too-hard basket. If automation is important to these clients, they are far more likely to choose you for their project.

Third, by having knowledge about the relevant technologies up your sleeve, and by working with an expert in the automation space, you and the client can get clear on their requirements early in the process. This means fewer last-minute changes, no rewiring after the plasterboard's gone up, and no call-backs for changes once the build or renovation is complete. From your perspective, the project stays on time and on budget, so you can walk away with the profit in your pocket and get to the next job on time.

This creates a smooth process for you and the client. They are happy, because they got everything they wanted on time and on budget. You are happy because there were no last-minute surprises, changes or complications. And because you have had such a great working relationship, they are more likely to send their friends and family to you in future.

Ultimately, working with your clients on their home-automation goals ensures that you get more business.

About this book

This book is designed to give you an overview of this 'automation thing' so that you can answer your clients' questions, find the right partner for your projects and deliver what your clients want.

[Type text]

To achieve this, rather than giving you the technical ins and outs of automation systems and how they work, I've focused on three simple things you need to nail to deliver your clients' desires:

1. **Build the dream**

   Just as it's the architect's responsibility to inspire a client about the design for their home, I believe it's the responsibility of the architect, builder and trades to inspire their clients about the possibilities of home automation. In this section I'll cover the four main benefits clients are looking for in home automation systems, and give you plenty of examples you can use to build your clients' automation dreams.

2. **Get educated**

   Now that your clients are excited, they're probably going to start asking questions. While you don't need to be an automation expert, having a high-level understanding of what's involved will both build your credibility and get them off on the right foot. As home automation consists of many components working together to achieve a set of pre-defined outcomes, in this section I'll discuss the different components involved, including the system, the technology and the connected features.

3. **Get help**

   The final stage is delivering on your clients' dreams, and to do this well, you'll need the right help. In this final section I'll share why your electrical contractor isn't the answer, how to find the right automation consultant, and what to expect once you start working together.

Once you've covered each of these areas, you'll be able to not only respond to any automation requests your clients have, but to deliver above and beyond their expectations. The ultimate result? Better client relationships and more referrals for your business.