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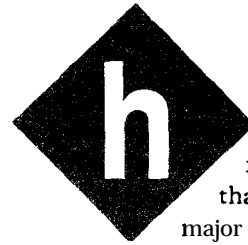
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The State of Home Systems

Tricia Parks



Where are we headed with home automation? Find out what one of the industry's leading marketing experts thinks is coming down the pike.

Home automation is an effect rather than a product: it is a major benefit expected from the proliferation of advanced systems and products in the home capable of sharing control and data messages via home networks. Ideally, and over time, our homes will adapt to the way we live in them while we live in them. Of course, this adaptation requires expert system software that can't be developed in any sophisticated manner until networks exist for testing and evolution.

CEBus, detailed in *Circuit Cellar INK* issues 10, 15, and 21, is close to release. What remains is a bit more debate over whether adequate levels of testing have occurred for the power line spread spectrum solution. Echelon's LonWorks is being used by several companies for product development. SMART HOUSE, a full system for new construction, will roll out in 1992. The message behind these statements, regardless of one's preference, is home networks are a reality. The '90s will contain the proliferation of networked products in the home.

Indeed, the market is not waiting, although it is Parks Associates' view that no broad-based market can occur for central controllers until home owners have both more awareness and more comfort with these systems. However, there are companies who do make such offerings currently. Unity Systems of California has emerged as the leader in central home automation systems with its Home Manager, its acquisition of Hypertek's Home Brain technology, and, to be blunt, its survival in a tough early market.

Home Automation Inc. is growing. It markets its system primarily as one for security that offers extra benefits beyond burglar alert.

X-10 (USA) Inc. controllers continue to proliferate and offer simple benefits, such as automatic lighting and timed responses from appliances including coffee makers and stereos.

Of equal note is the proliferation of intelligent subsystems from manufacturers in established categories. These companies are taking traditionally separate components and integrating them. The most obvious area of growth is home theater. The integration of audio and video into super-systems offering superior experiential benefits as well as distributed sourcing

is occurring rapidly. While home theater remains too esoteric for most consumers' budgets, it is certainly not too esoteric for their tastes. Every major entertainment manufacturer is entering this arena. With volume, equipment prices will drop, enabling more families to afford home theater.

In energy, both Carrier and Lennox are offering zoning systems. Carrier's HomeZone provides for up to four zones of HVAC off one heat pump, internal diagnostics, remote dial-out to a central station, and even electric utility pricing signals. Harmony, Lennox's new offering, also offers four zones and internal diagnostics. Each of these companies is taking back the control function traditionally left to control manufacturers to allow smoother integration of functions and enhance consumer benefits.

In security, several companies are expanding their systems to link to automatic lighting and remote (away from home) status, and even add control capabilities. Some are crossing categories into entirely new areas. ITI, the leading manufacturer of wireless security systems, has announced a

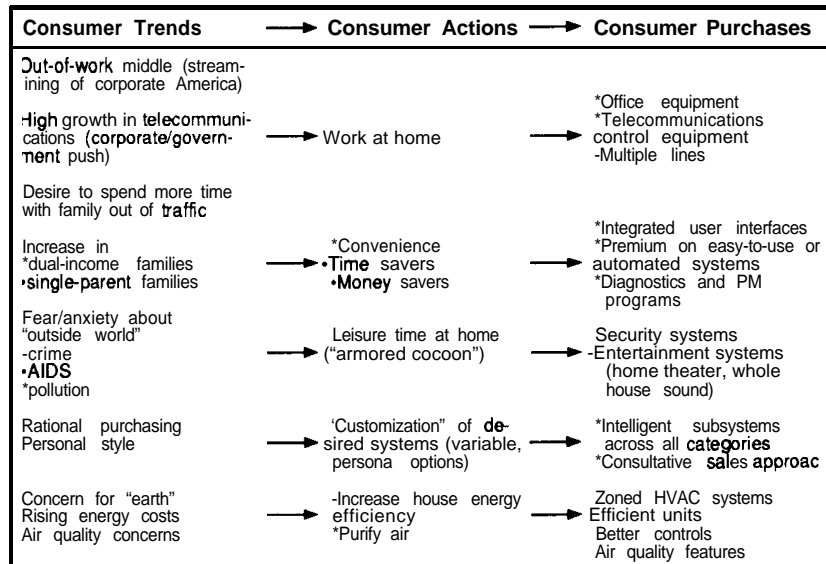
new product: The Meter Minder. The Meter Minder works with ITI's security system and allows electric utilities to read meters automatically and do load control as well as conduct traditional security monitoring.

Telecommunications equipment and services will explode by the end of this decade. With restraint relief vis-

Dual income families and single working parents are now a staple of America. These families are tired. They want hassle-free equipment (automatic) they can easily understand and use. These families are also busy. Retreating to home on weekends is deemed a luxury and a desire. Entertaining at home is becoming popular

again, which is good for all sorts of products including home theater and fancy A/V systems. Home theater is also viewed by many consumers as an excellent approach to shared family time at home.

Most American families desire privacy from outsiders while at home. Consumers will subscribe to automatic number identification as it becomes available. Also, managing a variety of life



ible for the Regional Bell Operating Companies, ISDN will finally emerge. So will new consumer services and equipment that allow consumers to comfortably use these services. Parks Associates believes it will take our giant telephone companies another 12 to 18 months to begin effective market rollout of new offerings, but they will do it and they will do it well for the most part.

Just as important to the process of home system penetration during the '90s are the reasons why consumers want these systems. Faith Popcorn, coiner of the term "cocooning" in the '80s, postulates that the '90s will be the era of the "armored cocoon." Our consumer research echoes her belief.

Consumers want to spend more time at home than they did in the '70s and '80s. Reasons for this trend include the consequence of baby boomers approaching or reaching 40 years old; the result of the "baby boomlet" (couples in their thirties having children); the reaction to scary external conditions ranging from pollution to crime to AIDS; and the shift in values towards those more family oriented.

roles is important to consumers. Fifteen percent of American homes have two telephone lines. Many homeowners would love to be able to distinguish their telephone calls by type. For example, knowing if an incoming call is business, social, or family in nature before you answer would be nice. ISDN will emerge in the '90s [finally] and will bring with it this capability for busy families.

In sum, the integration of functions to create more and better systems will occur rapidly in the '90s. This development will be possible because home networks will be available. The pricing of technological parts will continue to decrease, and consumers will want the benefits of these types of systems to make their lives easier and to make living at home more comfortable, more convenient, and safer. □

Tricia Parks is president of Parks Associates in Dallas, Tex. Tricia provides information to industries that serve residential environments with technologically advanced products, systems, and services.