

SMART-HOME TECHNOLOGY

Everything from lighting to doorbells, alarms and smoke detectors, garage openers, remotes and plugs

MEGAN MARTIN

While technology continues to creep into seemingly every facet of modern life, it should come as no surprise that the market for smart homes and smart-home products is growing steadily. Improvements in technology, as well as the ability to integrate software and services across a variety of platforms and devices, have been key to this emerging sector of the market. Today, smart-home tech is becoming increasingly common in all types of homes, as consumer demand continues to grow.

The number of smart-home products available on the market today is quite astounding, considering how young the industry is.

"Five years ago, smart homes were limited to products such as thermostats and security cameras; it didn't really get any more advanced than that," said Zayn Jaffer, vice-president of emerging business at Best Buy Canada. "But since then, the smart-home category has been growing.

"Today it not only includes a range of products, but also multiple categories. Consumers can purchase anything from smart lighting to doorbells, alarms, smoke detectors, garage openers, and even smart gardens."

Voice assistants are definitely up there when it comes to popularity, he added, as well as products that are compatible with voice assistants like smart lights, remotes, and plugs. Once a consumer purchases a voice assistant device and becomes more comfortable with its capabilities, they may start looking into what else it can do.

"Security cameras, doorbells, alarms and devices that help with securing your home are also very popular," Jaffer said. "These prod-



A view of the smart-home display at the Best Buy store, 470 Ste-Catherine St. W. PHOTO COURTESY OF BEST BUY CANADA

ucts allow consumers access to what is happening in their home even when they aren't there, and are easy to control through a smart phone. For example, if you are expecting a package to be delivered to your home at noon, you can keep an eye on when it arrives, if it arrives, and who dropped it off — all through a live feed on your smart phone.

While changes in technology have opened up a whole new world within the space of home automation, how homeowners are using the new technology is evolving as well.

"Today we're using technology

to create household ambience by merging the controls for different elements into the same platform to create a scene or mood," said Philippe Dunberry, vice-president of Câble&Son. "Let's say you're entering your home; now, with the push of a button, you can control lighting, shades, blinds, music, and more."

Being able to set the mood and feeling in a home is one reason for the huge popularity of automated lighting, he added.

"More people are becoming interested in the quality of lighting, so controlled light and motorized shades are very popular right now,"

Dunberry said. "Ambient music is very in demand, too."

The popularity of smart-home systems is really about making your life easier and more convenient, said Joel Orvis, vice-president, Bell Smart Home.

"When you get into the automation packages, you almost have to use your imagination just to think about all the things you can use it for to make your life simpler," Orvis said.

"I've personally got door locks, my garage door, and so many other aspects of my home that I can control through the app. I've set up a theme at nighttime, too, where I

can ask Siri to run the goodnight theme and the system will ensure all my doors are closed and locked, the alarm is on, and more."

While all of this sounds quite complex, smart-home technology has become extremely user-friendly, and more affordable than you might think.

"The prices for smart-home products begin as low as \$20 to \$30 and generally go up from there," Jaffer said. "Smart light switches, bulbs, and plugs start around this price point. Voice assistants start around \$40 to \$60 and generally go up from there; security cameras begin at around \$100 and go up from there."

Moreover, several new homes on the market today actually have smart-home technology built into their construction, and experts say they envision this becoming the standard moving forward.

"If you're building a house right now you should be thinking about incorporating smart-home tech into your house or in five years you'll be obsolete," Dunberry said. "It's affordable and you're able to quantify the profit after selling it. It impacts home value for sure; it's very in demand right now."

Changes in technology are having an impact on the very architecture and design of homes, he added.

"I think, moving forward, smart-home tech will be heavily integrated into the architecture of homes," Dunberry said. "We're working more with architects now than ever before and I foresee this continuing."

"I think, in a couple of years, working with a tech expert in designing a new home will be as important and essential as working with an electrician or a plumbing specialist."

Getting yourself organized at home with various apps

JENNIFER COX

I'll admit it: I'm a bit old-school when it comes to organizing my life. I still have a hardcover agenda I tote around with me, I keep a big monthly chalkboard calendar in our kitchen, and my countertop and desk are littered with little neon-coloured sticky notes. But after interviewing two professional organizers who resort only to apps to stay on top of things, I've got to admit that I may have to change my prehistoric ways.

"The organizational apps that are available help my clients who are worrying about forgetting something — anything," said Mylene Houle Morency, owner of FLO Organisation. "Our brains were never meant to be the keeper of the info. You can go into your brain to remember some things, but using it as a tool is basically setting us up for failure. Given all the things we need to remember, it's important that we use a system."

So Morency has turned to technology to keep her home life organized. Her go-to app of choice is **Cozi**, a family organization app that allows its users to do a whole host of functions, like keeping calendars and lists. It's free, easy to use from a computer or any mobile device, and can be synced with

other users (spouses and nannies, for example) to keep everyone in the know.

"I only put in things that are related to family," she said. "Repetitive things like sports; other random appointments like the hairdresser, doctor, dental, ped days, and reminders such as when the cleaning lady is coming; kid's birthdays with reminders for payment and gifts; anniversaries; and personal things that have an impact on the family, like late meetings or business trips."

"The great thing is, even though you don't have the reflexes to check in every day, they send you a weekly calendar as well as to-do and to-buy lists."

Another app Morency uses is **Trello**, where users create boards, lists, and cards to organize and prioritize different projects in a fun and flexible way.

"I use it to manage my children's artwork — I take pictures of everything and that way, I can dispose of the actual items," she explained. She then uses an app called **artkive** to make a hard-copy photo book that her three children can keep.

Other apps Morency keeps handy include **GasBuddy**, which finds real-time fuel prices based on postal codes so she can always

seek out the cheapest tank of gas. "It's perfect when you're driving kids around to various sporting activities," she said.

She also uses **CareZone**, a secure and worry-free way to manage you and your family's health care. "I like this for following prescriptions — if you or your kids are on antibiotics, it will give you notifications so you don't forget the doses. This can be really useful for families who have a lot of medications in the family. You can take pics of the labels, too, so that you always have it on-hand."

Stéphanie Galipeau is the owner of Harmonie Organisation Personnalisee and president of the Montreal chapter of the Professional Organizers of Canada (POC). She is a huge proponent of using technology to keep her family organized. She's a mompreneur with a two-year-old, and she relies on the app **Evernote** to streamline her everyday schedule.

"It's like your second brain — I find it amazing and very helpful managing everything," she said. Galipeau uses it for meal planning and for her business, as it al-



Cozi, a family organization app, allows users to keep track of calendar dates, appointments and events. SUPPLIED

lows her to leave any kind of note (typed, audio, photo) and access it from any tool (tablet, computer, phone or via the web).

"I really like to use it for when we travel — my husband and I put everything in there. We went to Australia and New Zealand at Christmas, so we had all the plans, road maps, reservations, etc. that we could get to at any time."

Because Evernote doesn't have an integrated calendar, Galipeau uses **Google calendar**. It's the perfect companion to Evernote, and allows this busy mom to stay on top of all her daily to-do's. "To always have everything with you saves you time and helps you with everyday life," she said.

Technology is here to stay, so we might as well embrace it and use it to its full potential. The apps

that are available to busy working families can help streamline everything, from appointments and special occasions to household chores and so much more, all within the palm of your hand.

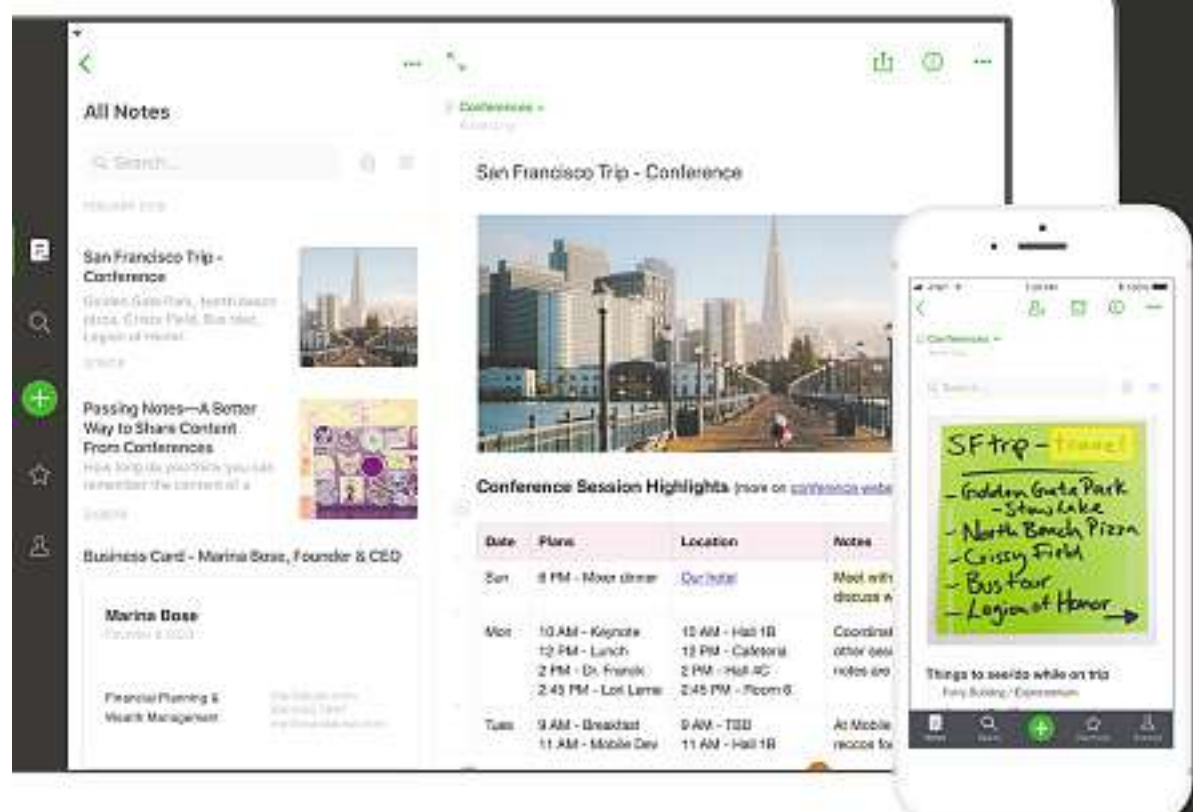
I guess it's time for me to retire my old-school paper calendars!



The Evernote app icon.



Artkive app allows a parent or teacher to create a hard-copy art or photo book that children can keep. SUPPLIED



The Evernote app can be used to streamline one's schedule, handling everything from meal planning to business concerns to travel plans. IMAGES SUPPLIED