



Total control: With the Home Connect app, users can monitor and control wi-fi enabled appliances from Siemens and Bosch from a smart device. The app can also suggest the ideal settings to wash dishes or laundry and even remind you to buy dishwasher tablets

THE SMART THING TO DO

In this extended focus on the smart-home market, **Francesca Seden** explains how KBB retailers can expand their product portfolio, and gets expert tips and advice on the best showroom strategies...

Smart home, connected home, the Internet of Things – these phrases have become increasingly common over the past few years.

And with the rise of voice activation systems, such as Google Home and Amazon Echo/Alexa, the smart or connected home is increasingly making its way from the realm of technology geeks and early adopters into that of the everyday homeowner.

And, while the price of some of this technology makes it prohibitive to the mainstream, like with smartphones and smart TVs, this technology is becoming more accessible and affordable. As a consequence, the smart home is expected to grow

from its relatively small base to become completely ubiquitous in the coming years.

This is backed up by research. According to a recent study by GfK, consumers increasingly expect technology to provide them with a seamless experience that improves their lives. As more products and services become internet-enabled, the idea of a fully connected home is becoming a reality. In the UK, 66% of consumers agreed that the smart home is an 'extremely', 'very' or 'fairly' appealing concept.

In 2017, Barclays analyst Manav Patnaik said that the connected home "could represent one of the most significant investment opportunities over

the next several years". Patnaik argued that the connected-home industry could be worth more than \$300 billion (£225bn) by 2020, with hardware estimated to contribute \$130bn and software and advertising \$170bn. Each of the smart-home specialists we interviewed for this feature agreed with Patnaik's assertion.

So, it's clear that there is great potential for this market to grow and that it very likely will. And given that KBB retailers and designers are designing for people's lives and futures, it is time to consider where the future is heading with regard to this market, and think about getting involved. And, according to all of the smart-home retailers already making a great success of this business, it might not require that much investment and is not as complicated as you might think.

So, if you're thinking of taking on a new challenge, read on. We talk to a selection of retailers and experts in the field to help demonstrate what can be done and how to go about it...



'Start small and build it up'

Ashley Shorey-Mills, general manager, Hughes Smart Home at Hughes Electrical – electrical multi-outlet retailer

Q&A

Q: What connected products would be good for KBB retailers to begin with?

A: Product-wise, the chats we've had with kitchen retailers we've been talking to have been about lighting. With a bit of smart lighting, you can really make a difference to how a home feels. So you start with the basic smart elements of lighting that people can easily recognise the benefits of, and then you can add on some bells and whistles.

Kitchen retailers need to keep their eyes on what is happening with smart appliances. We're still in the very early days, but it was the same with smart TVs. In those early days they were awful. But over time, manufacturers figured out what consumers wanted and now smart TVs are ubiquitous.

And it won't be long before appliances are truly smart and can perform diagnostics, tell you how you can make them more efficient, etc.

Next there is networking. We struggle with wi-fi speeds enough in this country as it is. So anyone looking to seriously get into smart-home installation will have to think about improving the home wi-fi network.

And it would be fairly easy to take the electrician that you always use and get them trained to do this. Networking is essential to everything, because if you're selling smart anything, none of it will work properly unless the network is right.

Q: What skills and experience are needed for making a success of this market?

A: Not a lot, really. You can start small and build it up. Lots of manufacturers offer free or very cheap training, and more in-depth training, like that offered by Cedia, might cost a bit more, but then you'll have someone that can confidently and competently install smart lighting or heating or whatever it might be.

And chances are, most of the professional electricians and tradespeople retailers work with, might already have some of this knowledge, but may just not use it. And if, they don't, it wouldn't take much investment to get them to a confident level.

Q: What are the major challenges and issues for retailers starting in this business, and what can they do to overcome these?

A: The biggest challenge is the lack of awareness. It's difficult to make people recognise the benefits and the only way you're going to make people understand them is to demonstrate the products and show them how they really work. There are loads of different ways to control smart technology. You could do it via your phone, but also with voice control, or simply by a switch, or a central panel, where you can control everything.

People are wary about this technology – and that's everyone from consumers to retailers to installers. We've lost work because the electrician that the customer has employed to do the work doesn't know how to install the product or doesn't think it's worth the money. You need to offer a strong after-sales service.

As for the 'grey pound' and older people being more wary, I would say more than 50% of the jobs that we've done are for the over-50s.

Q: Would KBB retailers do best to partner with a specialist?

A: I would try a bit of both. Maybe team up with a specialist at first, to get a feel for the market and also to make sure there is demand for it in your area, then you could start building it on your own.



Start with the basic smart elements of lighting that people can easily recognise the benefits of, and then you can add on some bells and whistles



Hive mentality: Hive Active Heating lets the user control their heating from a smartphone. This is a fairly easy plug-and-play solution that is claimed to save the homeowner up to £130 a year on heating bills. It allows the user to personalise the settings to fit their daily routine, and change them around on the Hive app



Fingertip finesse: The Touch Surface from Loxone can transform surfaces into a capacitive touch switch for the control of lighting, blinds and multi-room audio – only activating when needed. It can work on stone, wood, ceramic or glass surfaces. It can be battery or permanently powered, Loxone says.



Inside info: LG's LSR100 Signature InstaView Door-in-Door refrigerator features Eclipse Display and Smart ThinQ with wi-fi, which allows the user to monitor and control their refrigerator via a smartphone. The InstaView Door-in-Door lets the user see inside the fridge without having to open it



Hughes smart apartment



Clever coffee: The Smarter 2nd Generation coffee machine can be controlled by the user's phone to make a brew whenever desired. It features several modes that the user can set to make coffee at particular times of the day, as well as other personalisation settings. It also has a warming plate to keep the coffee hot



Hue and try: This lighting by Philips Hue combines brilliant and energy-efficient LED light with intuitive technology. The user has to simply screw the bulbs in, download the app, and personalise the settings. And they can be controlled via voice activation with Google Home, Amazon Alexa and Apple Siri



Water watcher : The Grohe Sense smart water sensor monitors humidity, detects leaks and alerts homeowners instantly in the case of a problem, while Grohe Sense Guard is installed in the main water pipe and can switch off the water supply in case of a burst pipe. Both use smart technology, and can be monitored and controlled using the Grohe Ondus App. It also link to Nest devices

'Working with a specialist is the most sensible option'

Henry Shephard, business development manager,
Cornflake – CI specialist, central London

Q & A

Q: What elements define the smart home in 2018 and how far are we from the technology becoming mainstream and accessible to all?

A: For a home to truly become 'smart', it requires all of the elements to talk to each other to enhance and automate the owner's life, usually, saving time. The typical elements are – heating and cooling, lighting, multi-zone audio, distributed video, cinema/home theatre. These are all accessible now at some level either via IoT devices or an integrated centralised network.

Q: What skills and sort of experience is needed for making a success in this market?

A: With IoT devices, it's becoming much easier to 'plug and play', but for true integration and automation there is still a huge wealth of engineering experience required to reach the finish that most homeowners require. Especially in bathroom and kitchen applications – this skill set is essential.

Q: Some smart-home specialists suggest that this market is too complex for anyone without years of experience and say the best way for KBB retailers to get involved in this market is to partner with a specialist – such as yourself. What's your take on this?

A: I think that currently this is still the most sensible option, especially at the high end of the market, where the consumer products like Amazon, Google and Apple's offering are to an extent obsolete. A very high-end system takes years of understanding to design, implement and programme to a level that will deliver consistently to the level required.

Q: Have you ever had to correct poor work carried out by someone who wasn't properly qualified. What was that experience like? What are the dangers of getting such an installation wrong?

A: If I asked the engineers here at Cornflake, I would have a list much longer than this article.

But the dangers are that the system firstly won't work consistently and certainly won't deliver what was promised. Apart from your company's reputation being on the line, it also gives the smart-home industry a negative reputation. Smart homes should make everyone's lives easier not more complicated.

Q: Will there ever come a time when connected appliances are useful enough to appeal to your customers, and if so, what sorts of features should they have?

A: I think undoubtedly smart appliances will find their way eventually. One barrier that kitchen appliances face is safety. If you can control the gas hob, cooker, microwave, etc – then if there is a failure, or malicious external source, could these turn on while you are absent and what could that mean? The worst outcome is obviously a burnt-down house. The topic of regulations and insurance of smart devices is one that is bubbling away at the moment and will come to the forefront in time.

However, more benign features, such as integrated screens, scales and timers, will be the first step into the kitchen. We are not there yet, but with automation touching every area of the home, it is only a matter of time.

Q: And for your customers, how much is it about just having the best solution rather than necessarily the smartest solution?

A: Great question. Reliability and ease of use are the key topics. Making sure that the solution works every time in the most user-friendly way is always going to win over the device that can do 100 things but it is impossible to get to do the one thing that you wanted. If you want the classic example of this, all you have to do is go back and see why iPods took the market by storm, even though there were countless 'smarter' solutions on the market.



Reliability and ease of use are key. Making sure that the solution works every time in the most user-friendly way



Kitchen display at Cornflake



'The biggest challenge is getting customers to change'

Ketan Patel, director, KBB Custom Interiors – kitchen and CI specialist in Hartley, Kent



Q: Where should kitchen, bedroom and bathroom retailers start if they want to get involved with the smart-home market? What products are good to begin with?

A: One of the great bits of kit out there at the moment is the Heos multi-room sound system by Denon. The reason I recommend this is that we'll often be putting lighting in, so it's relatively easy to wire in a couple of speakers at the same time. If a customer is spending £20,000 on a new kitchen, they may not mind spending an extra £250 to £450 on the speakers and amps.

Kitchen and bathroom retailers could install these speakers and sell them as an add-on, or, to clinch a deal, you could throw them in for free. Plus, once you've added one set, the system can easily be upgraded, and more speakers added in other rooms in the house.

Integrated lighting and heating is also fairly easy to achieve and the customer likes it when they only have to deal with you – and connected lighting is great because it can provide added security. You can program these systems so they can come on periodically while you're away from home to deter would-be intruders.

Q: Carlos Velázquez, corporate marketing director of bathroom brand Roca, said that although there is growing demand for smart-home products in the bathroom, the mid-market was still not ready for smart home. Has he got a point?

A: The problem with smart products, particularly in the bathroom, is that they are expensive – we're talking integrated music or smart TV – and these products can end up costing more than your bath or shower, so I think he is right. Cost plays a big factor in the mid-market, but smart technology is going to become increasingly affordable and so more accessible.



Integrated lighting and heating is also fairly easy to achieve and the customer likes it when they only have to deal with you

Q: Why aren't more kitchen and bathroom retailers getting involved with this market in your opinion?

A: One of the main reasons is that they don't have the know-how, or the time. If they're making plenty of money selling kitchens, they might not want the headache of all this extra stuff. It's not always plain sailing – it never is – and that might put retailers off. However, the systems are becoming so much easier to operate and so much more robust, and I think more retailers should be looking at this market.

Q: Many appliance manufacturers now have connected ranges, but most have been written off as just a bit gimmicky. What's your take on smart appliances and their usefulness?

A: I think they are quite gimmicky. I have them in my show kitchen, with wi-fi-connected ovens, but I've not used that functionality once. I've sold a few connected appliances and I can almost guarantee that most people haven't used the 'smart' functions.

With Google Home it's different, because the benefits are obvious and it's easy, but the biggest challenge is getting customers to change, and understand the benefits of smart appliances and use them as they should.



EXPERT VIEW

'A massive opportunity that cannot be ignored'

AWE MD Stuart Tickle on why it makes perfect sense to get into the smart-home market

Previously the preserve of the ultra-wealthy, connected devices are, in many cases, now enabling comparatively simple and inexpensive smart-home functionality. The question is, how can KBB retailers get involved?

There is a natural opportunity for bathroom, bedroom and kitchen. The move to incorporate connected home technology makes perfect sense and, with the right knowledge, it is fairly easy to do. The move will mean that the dealer can expand their business, bringing in more custom, and helping them stand out from their competitors.

The retail landscape is changing dramatically, so a wider, all-encompassing service that differentiates them from the others and the increasing non-store-based options is essential. Most KBB retailers already have many of the right skills and AWE can provide the products and training to make the smart home part of their offering.

The smart home is a massive opportunity that cannot be ignored, but retailers need to understand the user benefits of the smart-home products they are selling as a connected system, and how these devices may or may not connect with one another. Knowing at least a moderate level of networking and being knowledgeable is of paramount importance.

Not all smart devices are without shortcomings and working within a customer's home requires trust and professionalism to protect both reputation and profitability.

AWE's Smart Home Academy provides training including a Foundation Workshop and the Cedia-certified Networking School.

The key for KBB retailers in the smart-home market is to be able to add value through installation of a complete solution and build upon the strengths of their existing business.

• More information at www.awe-europe.com



One of Custom Interiors' recent projects





Multi-room music: Denon Heos is a wireless music system that allows the user to control all of their music from anywhere in the home. All you need is one or more Heos speakers and the free app. It features four wireless multi-zone music players, the Heos Bar sound bar and a subwoofer

Join the Q: The Aqualisa Q offers a highly personalised showering experience with the ability to create individual profiles and select from a range of preset experiences. It features a proximity sensor to reduce water output when the user steps away, reactivating when they step back. It can also activate the shower from up to 10 metres away



Do the Roomba: The Roomba 980 robot vacuum, controllable via an app, can keep track of its location and recharge as needed until the job is done. It also has a boost function that automatically increases power on carpets, where it's needed most



Laundry talk: Hoover's first washing machine with AI (artificially intelligence) – the AXI, features a 'voice assist' function. It can also advise on the best time to do the laundry based on the weather forecast. It can also contact Hoover directly if it detects a fault and book a date for an engineer to call



'Everyone should be selling the dream and reaping the financial rewards'

Martin Jukes, head of retail, Avensys
– electrical retailer in Crawley



Q & A

Q: Where should KBB retailers start if they want to get involved with the smart-home?

A: Lighting is a great place to start. Mood lighting and colour washes can transform a kitchen, bedroom or bathroom at the touch of a button. This can be achieved cheaply with products like Philips Hue or a more comprehensive system like Control4. Along with Hue, heating control is easy with products like Nest and obviously smart audio like Sonos plus blind control like Qmotion.

Q: What level of investment is required?

A: It could be as little as a £100 Hue starter kit, depending on how smart the client wants to go.

Q: What skills and sort of experience is needed for making a success in this market?

A: When adding 'basic' smart products, such as Philips Hue lighting, a day's training and you could be installing very quickly. Bigger, more professional systems like Control4, need specialist programming by qualified staff. But this gives easier control to more products for the client and also commands a higher installation fee.

Q: What are the major challenges and issues facing retailers starting in this business?

A: Demonstration is key. Show a customer how easy a product is to use and they'll buy it, especially if it makes their life easier. Give customers theatre in showrooms, wow them. Investment doesn't have to be huge. Start with add-on sales to a project and eventually the smart side can be bigger than a new kitchen or bathroom install.

Q: Some smart-home specialists suggest that the best way for KBB retailers to get involved in this market is to partner with a specialist. What's your take on this?

A: We partner with some builders and kitchen installers and this has proved very successful. This is partly why we are now moving into kitchen and bedroom sales and installation this summer.

Q: Why aren't more kitchen and bathroom retailers getting involved with this market in your opinion? And what are the main reasons?

A: I actually don't know. Some of the products are easy add-ons to a project that can soon mount up. Everyone should be selling the dream and reaping the financial rewards.

Q: Many appliance manufacturers now have connected ranges, but most have been criticised because of their closed systems and some have said that appliances won't truly be connected until they can all communicate with each other. However, with Google Home and Amazon, is this now changing?

A: Totally agree. The closed systems are OK if you are having just one brand, but if they were open, it would be so much easier. This would also encourage client take-up as some are scared to be left with a system that is redundant in a few years. Voice control is starting to bridge this gap though and even with multiple closed systems you can achieve the effect of one. This will never replace a system like Control4 for ease of use until every manufacturer unlocks and everything can link. ►

Avensys smart-tech showroom



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Start with add-on sales to a project and eventually the smart side can be bigger than a new kitchen or bathroom install



'Understand who you are pitching at'

Will Hopkins, managing director, Your Smart Home – a CI specialist with branches in Letchworth, Knightsbridge and Hexham



Q: Where should KBB retailers start if they want to get involved with the smart-home market?

A: The first thing is to understand who they are pitching at. If they operate a business that is based around off-the-shelf solutions, then there's several products readily available that would likely suit their needs. Few people today haven't heard of Amazon Alexa or Google Home, which provide nice ways of interacting with a system and basic control.

However, if their retail outfit is more bespoke, or aimed at a more discerning clientele, then the best step would be to partner with an automation company, who will be able to support them and provide access to a wider range of products capable of achieving much more.

Your Smart Home partnered with Sub Zero & Wolf UK in the refit of its Knightsbridge showroom. This partnership enabled them to specify technology to best suit their needs in that environment, so while "consumer level kit" was implemented in places (such as Amazon Alexa for Voice Control), the hardware it is actually controlling it with is hidden away and discrete.

The speakers blend into the ceiling and the light switches, although automated, feature Italian-designed surrounds that coordinate aesthetically with the décor of the showroom.

Q: Why aren't more kitchen and bathroom retailers getting involved with this market in your opinion?

A: The easiest way into the market is through off-the-shelf products. Unfortunately, these generally carry very low margins, which often aren't large enough to cover the cost of the support that is needed.

Q: Many manufacturers have been criticised because of their closed systems and some have said that appliances won't truly be connected until they use a common communication system...

A: The ability to interlink and intercommunicate is key. I've met with several kitchen appliance manufacturers and can say that they see the closed protocol as being a sales protection method. However, many retailers, and indeed purchasers, carry multiple brands in their showrooms or homes. I've yet to see any data that justify the logic that a closed ecosystem protects sales. In fact, I'd say it's actually the other way around. In today's connected home with Amazon, Google and Apple offering mainstream solutions, the ability to communicate is critical.



EXPERT VIEW

'Education is vital to move into this sector'

Matt Nimmons, MD of custom install association Cedia (EMEA), offers his views on why KBB retailers should and can get involved in the smart-home market

Smart tech is increasingly being integrated within kitchens. This trend will only increase and offer the opportunity for KBB retailers to meet the rising consumer demand, plus the potential for these appliances to be connected into more complex whole-room or house-wide automation systems.

As an industry, we are well aware of our responsibility in providing the building blocks to support and develop retailers' business in the connected home.

Integrating smart appliances and systems to be part of a broader, integrated control platform demands the skills of a professional — someone who has the technical ability to bring everything together in a synergistic 'whole-home' experience.

There are two approaches that retailers can take. One is to develop relationships with our members, many of whom are already well-connected with their own wealthy client base in the local area. Adding the skill sets of a Cedia member to the range of professional design and installation services that retailers already provide is, frankly, a no-brainer.

The other option is taking the educational route and training the team the smart-home essentials. By attending Cedia education, KBB retailers will become educated in the design and installation services, which will build business and allow customers to benefit from their local contact having a deeper understanding of the available options.

It also gives retailers the opportunity to really engage with their client on a unique tailor-made project, which most likely will guarantee them as a customer for life – building brand loyalty and future business.

By being able to offer support and services to the installed facilities, it allows regular work and income from the original project installed.

A growing number of retailers are making progress in this space – and doing good business. We're confident that this groundswell will persuade more retailers that they too need to evolve, by expanding their knowledge in the sector with industry training, as well as forming close partnerships with industry professionals.



Adding the skill sets of a Cedia member to the range of services KBB retailers already provide is a no-brainer

Education is vital for anyone who is interested in moving into this sector. Whether KBB retailers are looking to become better educated to install AV and data equipment themselves, or partner with a professional to carry out this type of work, it is important to have a basic understanding of the industry and where it's heading.

Cedia's Intro to Smart Home Technology one-day course is a perfect starting place for KBB retailers who want to take the direct educational route.

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• To find out more about Cedia and the training opportunities available, visit www.cedia.co.uk.



Winner of Cedia awards 2016 in Best Integrated Home under £100,000 category

