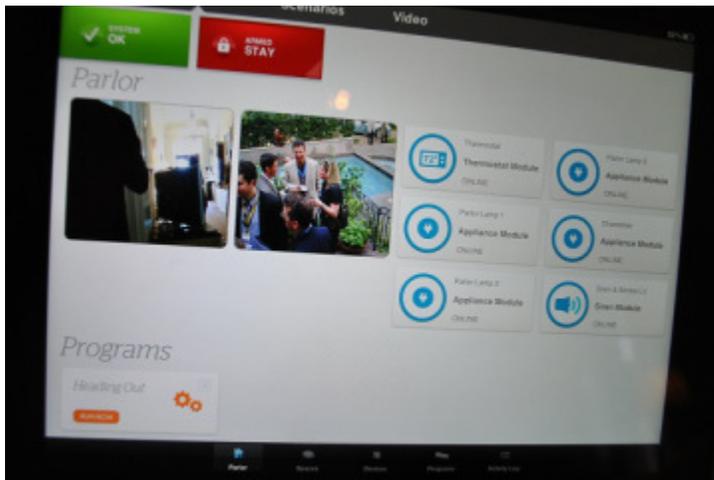


AT&T

AT&T Looking to Simplify Home Automation and Security

By Jared Newman @OneJaredNewman May 09, 2012



Jared Newman / TIME.com

Home automation might not be just for geeks anymore if AT&T can live up to its promises.

On Monday, AT&T announced “Digital Life,” the company’s plan to get into the home automation and security business. Users will be able to control their lighting, thermostats, window blinds and anything else that has an on-off switch using apps on any phone, tablet or computer.

(MORE: AT&T to Sell Home Automation and Security Services Nationwide)

Although home automation has been available for years, it’s still not a mainstream product. For companies that offer complete installation, their pricing is often expensive, and you may have to get an in-home consultation before setting anything up or getting a quote. Other companies with cheaper service require users to set everything up on their own.

AT&T hopes to pique customers’ interest with a simple set-up process and low prices. The company promises to rig an entire smart home without advance consultation, and though AT&T hasn’t announced pricing yet, Vince Ilardi, AT&T’s director of sales operations, said the cost will be

competitive with what other companies charge for home security alone. (ADT charges about \$40 per month, plus \$400 and up for installation.)

Here's how it will work: An AT&T crew brings all the necessary gear to set up home automation. For plug-in devices, such as lamps or music players, the crew installs wireless control modules over the outlets. For built-in devices, such as ceiling lights or mechanical window blinds, AT&T can either install its own wall switches or place a module behind the existing switch. AT&T also installs its own thermostat. Everything communicates wirelessly through a control box, which connects to AT&T's 3G network for security monitoring.

Customers can then use apps to control their homes, and can also set up conditional events. For instance, the system can turn on all the lights in a home during a break in, or turn up the heat and start the coffee maker when the user turns on the bedroom lights in the morning. Compared to smart home apps from Verizon and Time Warner (our parent company), whose device controls work in isolation, AT&T's method of grouping actions together seems more advanced.

Of course, it's easy to be optimistic about a service that at the moment only exists in theory. Without full price details, it's hard to say how competitive AT&T will be, and the company's moving slowly, with trials beginning in Atlanta and Dallas this summer. AT&T's promise of hassle-free, inexpensive home automation is alluring, but it'll be a while before we know if the company can pull it off.

(MORE: HomeOS: Microsoft Works on Bringing Smart Homes to the Masses)