

The President's Pen by Don VanSyckel
Home Automation and Security
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www.sterlingheightscomputerclub.org
don (at) vansyckel.net

I've been looking at home alarm systems and thermostats. I guess it's a sign of the times. Many of these have connectivity via your home Wi-Fi and some have built-in cellular connectivity.

- Most offer remote control via a web site accessible from your PC or from a dedicated smart phone app.
- My neighbor tells me his garage door opener can be status checked and controlled remotely.
- Then there are refrigerators that have cameras in them, so you can, supposedly, check out your supply of stuff while you're at the grocery store. Hopefully you never park a tall or big item in front of the camera.
- I've also seen advertised door locks that can be remotely monitored and controlled.

There are other home automation systems such X10 and Zwave products that offer most of the features on the individual products listed above, but in one integrated system.

The issue, or possibly more accurately my reservations about these systems, is that most are not controlled or accessed by you directly. Most only 'talk' to the manufacturer's web site and you 'talk' to the same web site. You get the illusion that you're communicating directly but you're not. So, what. Well, companies come, and companies go, so what happens if the manufacturer of one or more of your products goes out of business? What happens to the web site that you're dependent on? Possibly another company will take it over, but I would bet that in this case a fee would be involved. Can anyone spell "Edsel" or "Hudson?" Another 'feature' of most of the new systems is they're totally dependent on batteries. Granted some system / battery combinations can run several years before requiring a battery replacement. They still need replacing.

Members were asked to keep some of these issues in mind for their January presenter, Mr. Derek Bricknell from Best Buy in Madison Heights, who presented "Home Security and Automation." It should be an interesting presentation.

Note from Judy: Do you have a Best Buy in your area? You might want to ask the store / general manager if someone can give a "Home Security and Automation" presentation to your group. Don't forget to mention that the Sterling Heights Computer Club had one at their January meeting. They might ask you to get in touch with the Best Buy home office to request the presentation. They also might donate something, along with the presentation.