

Lowe's Unveils "Smart Home" System



BY SANDY FITZGERALD | THU JAN 05, 2012 4:09 PM

Home-improvement retailer Lowe's will bring the "smart home" concept closer to the mainstream, selling kits to let users manage homes through the cloud.

The company is pairing with AlertMe, a U.K.-based company that will provide equipment and a cloud-server. The kits will connect thermostats and alarm systems to a home network, which users can access through the Internet or an app to manage, giving them access to device settings.

The products, set for release later this year, will be affordable for "the mass market," according to Kevin Meagher, vice president and general manager for the smart home program at Lowe's.

Lowe's said customers likely will be attracted to the cost-savings and convenience of the smart technology, which can link a home's devices into a network, making them more accessible. The company partnered with AlertMe because its system is able to control multiple devices from a single app.

The new kits are part of a larger trend linking mobile devices with users' homes. For example, last summer, Google unveiled its [Android@home program](#), which partnered with Lighting Science Group to build a wireless home lighting network that can be remote-controlled with an Android smartphone.

Google also plans to create a wireless home theater system that also controllable with a smartphone, under its "Project Tungsten" program, its blueprint for a connected-home.

However, since Lowe's new products are cloud-based, homeowners will be able to access their devices' controls through any computer or mobile device they log onto and won't be limited to only one OS. AlertMe charges a monthly fee for its U.K. customers, but Meagher said U.S. customers will likely not need to pay extra fees. The website for the systems will be operated through Lowe's.

Lowe's new system is expected to drive product sales for the company, because over time, many more of the company's products will be Internet-enabled.

"We think there's a real danger the whole market could stall if we just let all our manufacturing partners stick things on the shelves without considering the broader interests," Meagher said. "Consumers stand to get confused by the technology and lose the real benefits."

The base AlertMe system includes a wireless thermostat, plugs, and a small network hub. The full system will also include security gear, including a wireless front door lock and motion detection system. The kits will work with Wi-Fi, Zigbee and Z-Wave wireless connections.

As more people become connected with smartphones and tablets, home management systems likely will continue to grow and help people remain linked with their homes, even if they're miles away from their own front doors.