

THE 10 MINUTE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING SMART HOMES

Everything you need to know to build your dream smart home...without being overwhelmed.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Click the numbers to jump to a specific section

[1](#) What's a smart home?

[2](#) What's a smart home installer?

[3](#) What's the process of working with a smart home installer like?

[4](#) Is working with a smart home installer right for me?

[5](#) How much does professional smart home installation cost?

[6](#) How do you choose a smart home installation company?

THE 10 MINUTE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING SMART HOMES



The smart home technology market is growing rapidly, and much of that growth is in the DIY space. Setting up your smart home yourself can be a great option for many people, but what if you aren't tech-savvy?

Or what if you don't want to spend time researching, buying, and tinkering with technology to get the smart home you want?

That's where smart home installers come in.

Also called custom integrators, smart home installers handle your entire smart home installation. This process includes the often complicated work of choosing the right smart home ecosystem to control all the devices you want and handling the construction necessary to install all of your technology.

But even though smart home technology itself can be difficult to wrap your head around, working with a smart home installer shouldn't be.

This guide gives you all the information you need to know about smart homes and what a smart home installer can do for you, so you can find the best custom integrator for you and go into your project informed of everything that's possible.

But let's start with the most important thing to know – what's a smart home anyway?

WHAT'S A SMART HOME?

A smart home is an automated home with different devices controlled by one central hub. The number of devices you can control with a single remote or app is seemingly endless, but commonly include:

- TVs
- Speakers
- Lighting
- Window treatments
- Security
- Thermostats
- And more, depending on the device

Because this guide would be extremely long if we went into detail about everything a smart home can control, let's focus on the backbone of smart homes: the hub that integrates everything.

Think of a smart home hub like Apple iOS or Android.

Smart home hubs can run and control different devices, each with a different interface and functionality.

Without one command center, you'll have various products, each operating with their own controls. If you have one or two devices, that's probably no big deal.

But if you have many, you'll end up with a lot of different remotes and apps that all do different things – and that, of course, doesn't make your life easier.

That's where smart home installers come in.



WHAT'S A SMART HOME INSTALLER?



Smart home installers are low-voltage subcontractors specializing in installing and programming home automation technology, which includes:

- Consulting with you on what you'd like out of a smart home
- Designing your smart home system, including picking your control hub
- Handling installation
- Programming the technology to work together
- Providing support after installation

Many smart home installers work with builders to pre-wire homes, which makes installing smart home technology a much simpler process for the eventual homeowner; they won't need to cut into drywall or run wires through an attic to connect your devices to the internet, since everything will already be in place.

But you can also hire a smart home installer after your home has been built, a process called retrofitting. They'll have to do some construction, depending on what you'd like, the extent of it, and the architecture of your home.

Smart home installers typically use different technology hubs than consumers because they can handle more complicated setups.

The three go-to companies in the industry are Control4, Savant, and Crestron. Control4 is the most popular of the three and offers the most connectivity to different devices.

Each system is more than capable of controlling your smart home, but companies typically specialize in programming one.

WHAT'S THE PROCESS OF WORKING WITH A SMART HOME INSTALLER?

Understanding what will happen when you work with a smart home installer can ease your worries about the process. You shouldn't have to go into a major project like this completely in the dark.

For the sake of this content, we'll assume that you already own and live in your home, meaning you'd need a retrofit. If you want to know more about having your house pre-wired, you can find that in [this blog](#).

The process may differ slightly from company to company, but most companies will incorporate these stages:

- Consultation and design
- Installation
- Programming
- Support

1) CONSULTATION AND DESIGN

The first stage in working with a home automation installation company is the consultation and design. In this phase, a company you've contacted will talk with you about your vision for your smart home. This conversation can include discussing your budget, figuring out the products you want, assessing your property, and asking any questions or concerns you might have about smart home technology.

From there, your company will design your system and create a proposal outlining everything you'd like and everything necessary to install your smart home, as well as the price. If you decide to proceed with their proposal, they'll schedule your installation.



2) INSTALLATION

The installation stage sounds straightforward at first. The team you've hired will come into your home, run wires through your attic or walls if necessary, and connect your equipment.

But every house is different. An older home might have thick walls or obstructions within them that stall the project. Or maybe your home is newly built, and the process is a breeze. A pro can catch many of these potential problems upon an initial walkthrough, but sometimes, an installer can't tell what they'll encounter before they cut into your walls.

Regardless, your smart home installer should keep you updated on any and all delays that might be happening.



3) PROGRAMMING

Now that your equipment is installed, it needs to be programmed to work together seamlessly.

The programmer will set up the rack, or the technology closet, and use software to integrate all aspects of your smart home. Sometimes devices aren't compatible, but with systems like Control4, this is becoming less and less common.

This stage is the difference between a well-coordinated smart home and a bunch of technology that makes life more complicated. If programmed improperly, you'll end up with a complex system that has to be controlled with several remotes or apps. Or worse, a system that doesn't work.

4) SUPPORT

Congrats, your smart home project is complete! Now what? You enjoy it the way you envisioned, of course. But what if you need help? Or what if something stops working?

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Most manufacturers include a warranty on the equipment for several years, and some installers have a warranty on the work itself for shorter periods.

But what if something happens after the warranties lapse?

Like anything you have installed in your home, your system will require maintenance – software might need to be updated, and technology may become outdated to the point where it can't be integrated with the rest of your system anymore.

Your installer should offer service calls or at least steps to troubleshoot your system. Hive offers service plans that allow you to keep your system running smoothly, sometimes updating and fixing your system before you even know that you have a problem.

IS WORKING WITH A SMART HOME INSTALLER RIGHT FOR ME?

We should be completely transparent – working with a smart home installer isn't for everyone. It has its pros and cons.

A good way of thinking about the pros of working with a smart home installer is to think of home improvement projects – you could technically do things yourself, but is that the best decision to get the desired result? Let's take a closer look at all of these pros and cons.



THE ADVANTAGES OF WORKING WITH A SMART HOME INSTALLER

Smart home technology can be within reach once you find the right installer. The benefits of working with a smart home installer are:

- Your system will be set up properly, especially if it's complex
- You won't have to do the installation yourself
- You have a professional help you find the ideal devices
- You'll have support if anything goes wrong

PRO #1: YOUR SYSTEM WILL BE SET UP PROPERLY

One of the biggest draws of home automation is simplifying your life, which is harder to accomplish than you might think. Hive often sees people who put together their own systems and need four different remotes just to watch something on their TVs.

A smart home installer will know the ins and outs of whatever devices you have, ensuring that they work together and are placed optimally.

PRO #2: YOU WON'T HAVE TO INSTALL IT YOURSELF

Installing a smart home can be tedious if you want more than a few wireless speakers or a doorbell. This is especially true if you'd like hardwired devices, which tend to be more stable than wireless options but require some construction work to your home.

With professionals handling it, you'll have guidance every step of the way, and you won't have to spend frustrating hours looking up how to connect your devices.

PRO #3: YOU'LL HAVE HELP FINDING THE BEST DEVICES FOR YOU

The options for smart home technology are so vast that finding the perfect fit for you can be daunting. Not only do you have to consider something basic like price, but you have to consider whether it can do what you want *and* work with different parts of your system.

A smart home installer can guide you during the consultation phase to help you get the best possible device. Additionally, smart home integrators are often licensed dealers of reliable brands and can usually get products unavailable to the general public.

PRO #4: YOU'LL HAVE SUPPORT IF YOUR SYSTEM GOES DOWN

While some specific brands have customer service and troubleshooting guides, you might encounter a problem with two different devices from two different brands. Or, in the case of many smart home hubs, figuring out the issue in a web of different devices can be beyond the skillset of most people.

In an instance like this, having a pro in your corner can save you a lot of headaches. Many smart home installation companies have support to either walk you through the steps to get your system up and running, or come out to fix the problem for you.



THE CONS OF WORKING WITH A SMART HOME INSTALLER

The most common drawbacks of working with a smart home installer are:

- It's more expensive than doing it yourself
- It might take longer than doing it yourself
- Your system might be too small to make a pro worthwhile

CON #1: YOUR SYSTEM MIGHT BE TOO SMALL TO MAKE A PRO WORTH THE COST

The size and complexity of your system are some of the biggest determinants of whether you should choose a smart home installer or do it yourself. Small systems with just one or two different kinds of technology that you'd like to connect are probably simple enough for you to set up on your own.

This is especially true with the number of user-friendly smart home ecosystems out there. For instance, if you get an Alexa-enabled doorbell and speaker, you should be able to easily connect the two devices.

However, hiring a pro is entirely up to you. If you don't feel like setting up a small system, you can hire someone to help you do so. But be aware that many smart home installation companies might not take on smaller jobs.

CON #2: IT'S MORE EXPENSIVE THAN DOING IT YOURSELF

Hiring a professional will always cost more than doing it yourself. You'll have to pay labor and materials costs on top of the cost of the devices. If you don't want to devote a larger budget to your project, you might want to find a system that you can install yourself easily.

But as we've said throughout, sometimes going with a pro is the best option to get what you want – you just have to decide whether you feel the cost is worthwhile.

CON #3: IT'LL TAKE LONGER THAN DOING IT YOURSELF

Hiring a professional will almost always take longer than doing it yourself. Taking scheduling and actually completing the project into account, the project will likely take weeks or even months. However, talking to a smart home installer about your unique case is the only way to know how long your specific project will take.

HOW MUCH DOES PROFESSIONAL SMART HOME INSTALLATION COST?

The short answer is that it depends. Smart homes are customized to the client, as are the homes they're installed in, so the range we'd give you wouldn't mean that much.

However, we can give you the factors that affect a smart home's cost so you can better understand whether you'll have to go with a bigger or a smaller budget. These factors are:

1. The size of your home
2. The architecture of your home
3. The devices you choose
4. The strength of your current network

Let's explore how those elements can increase or lower your smart home costs.



#1: THE SIZE OF YOUR SPACE

As with any project, the more space you're trying to cover, the more it'll cost. For instance, if you want security cameras, you'll need more to fully monitor your whole property. Or if you're putting surround sound in a large room, your speakers will need to be more robust, and by extension, more expensive.

Also, since many smart home projects are priced on time and materials, you'll need a higher budget to accommodate the additional wiring and time it takes to set everything up.

#2: THE ARCHITECTURE OF YOUR HOME

The architecture of your home factors into your budget, too. As we said above, many projects are time and materials. If your walls or attic happen to be difficult to run wires through, it'll take longer for your technicians to finish the job.

The same applies if you're getting something like landscape lighting, which might require trenching in your yard. The company's technicians might run into obstacles like tree roots that stall a project.

#3: THE DEVICES YOU CHOOSE

The devices you choose, the type of service you're getting, and the number of devices you need are some of the biggest elements in your smart home budget. If you'd like a home theater, you'll have to budget for your projector, its screen, and other devices like receivers to have it fully operational.

While you can choose lower-priced devices, this can sometimes cause problems in the long run. Buying higher quality devices might be more of a cost upfront, but you'll save on repairs and service calls if you make the investment.

#4: THE STRENGTH OF YOUR CURRENT NETWORK

A solid internet connection is the backbone of smart home automation technology. If your Wi-Fi signal is too weak to support all of the devices you want, or if your signal doesn't reach certain areas of your home, you may need to add a wireless access point or repeater to strengthen it.

YOUR BUDGET IS UP TO YOU

Ultimately, the amount you want to spend on your smart home is up to you. But if you find that you want certain things that are currently outside of the range you'd like to spend, you can start with the absolute basics.

For instance, if you want to make your entire backyard smart, you don't have to do your sun shades, rock speakers, outdoor TV, landscape lighting, and pool control at once. You can start with your central hub and add one of those things – you can always add to your system later.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A SMART HOME INSTALLATION COMPANY?



Hiring someone to take on a smart home installation project shouldn't be taken lightly. They'll be responsible for doing construction within your home, using a crew who will be in and out of the spaces you use every day. Hiring a great company can mean the difference between a great experience and a huge headache.

Here are the **11 questions** to ask to ensure that you're hiring the right company for the job:

1. What experience do you have installing smart home technology?
2. Are the installers employees or subcontractors?
3. Are you licensed and insured?
4. What brands do you work with?
5. Are you an authorized dealer of these brands, or do you buy them through distribution?
6. Can you work with my existing technology?
7. Can you provide references, reviews, or testimonials?
8. Do you offer any warranties and guarantees?
9. What's your pricing structure? What are your hourly labor rates, and how are overages handled?
10. Do you provide ongoing service plans?
11. What's the lead time between starting the project and finishing it?

#1: WHAT EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE INSTALLING SMART HOME TECHNOLOGY?

When it comes to installing smart home technology, experience matters. You want to hire someone with a proven track record of successfully installing the types of devices you want in your home. For instance, you wouldn't want a company that primarily focuses on smart lighting to do your security system.

Ask potential installers how long they've been working in the industry and if they have experience installing the specific products you're interested in.

#2: ARE THE INSTALLERS EMPLOYEES OR SUBCONTRACTORS?

Your company's installers being employees or subcontractors might not seem like a big deal, but it is. If the company uses its own employees, they'll have worker's compensation in case they're injured on the job.

If they're subcontractors, they might not have it. And that means if they get injured while working on your home, you'll be liable for the situation.

#3: ARE YOU LICENSED AND INSURED?

Similar to whether your installer uses employees or subcontractors, ensuring that they're licensed and insured protects you in case of any accidents or damage during the installation process.

Ask potential installers for proof of their license and insurance, and make sure they are up-to-date.

#4: WHAT BRANDS DO YOU WORK WITH?

Not all companies work with all brands, and working with a company that doesn't stock quality products you're interested in will leave you with a subpar smart home.

You'll also want to consider what price range you'd like to stay within when it comes to your smart home devices. If your budget doesn't allow for the cost of labor and high-end devices, consider going with a company offering mid-level options.

#5: ARE YOU AN AUTHORIZED DEALER OF THESE BRANDS, OR DO YOU BUY THEM THROUGH DISTRIBUTION?

If a company is an authorized dealer of a brand, they can offer more products, warranties, and services than a company that only buys them through distribution. In some instances, companies that only buy through distribution can't get certain products at all.

Since installing smart home technology is a big investment, you want to ensure that you get the highest quality product with the best warranty possible.

#6: CAN YOU WORK WITH MY EXISTING TECHNOLOGY?

Just as some companies don't stock certain brands, some companies don't work with certain brands. This can be for several reasons, but one major one is that they only work with products that integrate with each other to keep smart homes simple.

If you have existing equipment from several different brands, ask a prospective smart home installer whether they can work with what you already have. If not, purchasing upgrades may open up your options for smart house providers.

#7: CAN YOU PROVIDE REFERENCES, REVIEWS, OR TESTIMONIALS?

It's a good idea to talk to a company's past clients. Ask for references and follow up with them to ask about their experience working with the installer. Did they arrive on time? Did they communicate clearly? Did they clean up after themselves?

Companies may also have testimonials on their site that go further into depth about the customer experience. Checking a company's reviews on Google, Houzz, or Thumbtack is always a good idea as well.

#8: DO YOU OFFER ANY WARRANTIES AND GUARANTEES?

Ask about warranties or guarantees before hiring an installer, including ones for both the devices being installed and the labor involved. This ensures that you're covered in the event that something goes wrong with your smart home technology after installation.

For instance, a measurement guarantee on smart shades would make the company liable if the measurement for the shades was off. Without this warranty, you would have to pay for the same shades twice and wait for them to be cut again.

#9: CAN YOU EXPLAIN YOUR PRICING? WHAT ARE YOUR HOURLY LABOR RATES AND HOW ARE OVERAGES HANDLED?

Get a clear understanding of how a company prices its services. Is the labor based on an hourly rate? Is there a charge for overages, and if so, what is it? Ask for a detailed breakdown of their fees, and make sure you understand what is included.

Making sure you have a clear understanding of what you'll be paying for before agreeing to hire an installer will help you avoid getting an unpleasant surprise when the bill arrives.

#10: DOES YOUR SMART HOME INSTALLATION COMPANY PROVIDE SERVICE PLANS?

You wouldn't get your landscaping done and expect it to be perfect from that point forward. The same goes for your smart home. A Smart Home Installation Company with service plans will allow you to keep your smart home in top condition. Ask potential installers what kind of ongoing support they offer and whether they provide any maintenance or repair services.

#11: HOW LONG WILL A PROJECT TYPICALLY TAKE?

Installing smart home technology is a project with numerous moving parts, so knowing the potential timeline of your project is very important. Some companies have busy seasons at different times of the year, and some products may take a while to come in. Most companies have a lead time before they can begin work.

CONCLUSION

By now, we hope that you have everything you need to know about working with a smart home installer. But if you're still interested in knowing more, please check out our learning center at hivestyle.com/learning-center.

Or, if you haven't already, set up your consultation, please call us at (813) 575-4483!