

Technology and You

The number of clients looking to improve a home's energy efficiency through automation is starting to increase.

by Brenda Kleinjan

FROM ENTIRE WALLS THAT LIFT WITH A TOUCH of a button to steps that light up when walked upon, home automation is no longer the stuff of "The Jetsons" cartoon series.

Sioux Falls, S.D.-based Foss Communications and Security and Audio Video Integrations have installed both the movable wall and the steps in homes within their 200-mile service area.

"One of the biggest things that excites me is that the home technology market is becoming more of a norm," said Jerry Cook, co-owner of Foss-AVI which are full-service integrators for communications, security, entertainment and lifestyle needs. "We have clients building their next house that are asking for the same things or more."

While not every home will have movable walls or steps that light up, more and more homes are utilizing high-tech media rooms, whole-house

sound systems, lighting controls and centralized vacuum systems.

"On the HVAC and lighting, the primary reason at this point why our clients are seeking out an automation system are the ease of use and aesthetics," said Cook.

Cook said that in larger homes, customized lighting systems can eliminate wall clutter created by having a series of light switches that control different lights within a room or series of rooms.

"Through our systems, they can get one nice elegant touch panel in one location," said Foss.

The number of clients looking to improve a home's energy efficiency through automation is starting to increase a bit more, Foss said.

"The dimming capabilities can help them save money on their electric bill. We haven't quantified that, but logically when you run a light at 50 percent brightness rather than at a 100



percent, you're bound to save money," said Foss.

"From the HVAC perspective, it's less about saving energy and more an ease of use." Cook said of the benefits of having a centralized control point for an entire home's energy use. Some of the homes Foss-AVI works with can reach 12,000-square feet and feature heated garages that are also incorporated into the system.

Cook said on the energy front, one trend his company sees with its clients is their use of geothermal systems for heating and cooling their homes.

"One of the things our clients are doing is running geothermal systems in their house," said Cook. "That allows them to keep their house at the temperature they want while still saving on their energy bills."

"When you can take the heat for your house out of the ground and all you run is a water pump and fans, it significantly reduces the amount of energy you use," said Cook.

While a fully automated lighting system might not be in every homeowner's budget, Cook noted that using compact fluorescent light bulbs can be a great benefit.

"For those with larger budgets, the incandescent route with a lighting automation system provides the savings with the quality of light they're looking for," Cook said.

"It's kind of like a dishwasher – 30 years ago, you

Opposite: Programmable thermostats are some of the simpler technologies used in today's high-tech homes. **Above:** Home controls such as this Creston panel can allow homeowners to streamline their home's technology for comfort and convenience. The company says its Total Home Technology Solution eliminates the need to walk from room to room to adjust drapes, lights, temperature and audio/video components.



might have bought a house without one, now it's pretty much a standard feature in most homes," said Cook.

The increased use of technologies in homes is an area Cook sees as growing in the future.

"It's becoming more mainstream. Ten years from now what's going to be common place in homes, people are going to want more and more technology as we go along, not less."

Automation and technology are paying a role in the area's ag-based businesses, too.

Whether it's combines and harvesting equipment equipped with global positioning satellite receivers or the ability to monitor livestock barns via the Internet from just about anywhere, the region's farms and ranches are also going high-tech.

At Hillside Colony near Hitchcock, S.D., the colony uses a Web page to monitor their turkey barns and other ag enterprises. These controls allow the colony to control the climate of their barns and automate feeding of the animals.