

As seen in:

**ELECTRONICHOUSE**



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# Home Control

It's TOO WARM. It's TOO COLD. THERE'S SOMEONE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR. THE MUSIC IS TOO loud. Oops, I think I left the lights on in the upstairs closet. These are just some of the little "problems" that happen in everyone's household. Of course, the solutions are easy enough. Just tweak the thermostat, open the door and run upstairs to switch off the light. No big deal. ■ But, if you plan to build a large, sprawling home, each jaunt to a door, a thermostat, a window shade or a light switch can add up to a whole lot of running around. Even completing these tasks in a modest-sized, two-story home can get tiring when you stop to think about the daily adjustments electronic systems require. ■ Here's where a home-control system earns its weight in gold. From several convenient locations in your home you can monitor, manage and operate all of your electronics. From motorized window shades and light fixtures to the stereo and the security system, it's all at your fingertips. And what better place to run the show than in the kitchen?

## Reasons for a Control System

**Household Management.** Over the years, the kitchen has evolved from a room visited only when meals were prepared and eaten into the main command post of a house. Here, schedules are posted, friends gather for drinks, kids dump their backpacks, bills are paid and precious little downtime is enjoyed. Given the generous amount of time that most families spend in a kitchen, it makes sense that it should also be the space from which various electronic systems of a house are centrally managed.

From the kitchen, for example, you might adjust the temperature of the house or arm the security system before you go to bed. It's also a convenient place from which to turn on the news and activate the sprinklers in the morning. And it's not just about the things *you'd* like to control. Everybody who's anybody in your house—the kids, the housekeeper, the in-laws—hit the kitchen first before moseying off to other rooms. They would also appreciate a simple way to switch off the security system before the alarms sound, and to call up a little music without having to hunt down a remote control.

**Convenience.** The ability to monitor and modify all the electronic systems in your house from one central location is extremely handy. There's no need to run to the stereo in the family room to turn down the music. Just do it from the kitchen by using a handheld remote control or a wall-mounted controller.

**Posting Reminders.** How many times has this happened to you: It's Tuesday (trash day). In a rush to get to work, you leave the garbage cans, chock full and smelly, sitting in the garage. If you had a home control system, you would be able to receive a message from a wall-mounted keypad reminding you to dispose of the mess before you drive away.

**Better Organization.** When a household is buzzing with activity, it's easy to forget the details. Through the power of its internal software, a home-control system can remember to deactivate the landscape lights at sunrise, for example. (This and other parameters are programmed into the system by a professional home-systems installer.) Such programmability means that a home-control system can work around your family's unique schedule and needs.

## Control Options

**The Touchscreen.** One of the best ways for you and others to succinctly manage and operate various electronic systems is through

a touchscreen. This laptop-sized screen receives information about all the systems you might have in your house from a central processor (located in the basement or a utility room). The screen then logically presents information about those systems and invites you to modify their settings. It's as easy as withdrawing money from an ATM. In fact, the touchscreen's similarities to an ATM are what makes it a particularly appealing type of control to have in a kitchen. Anyone who steps into the room should be able to operate the screen without any trouble.

You can also use the touchscreen for things other than controlling your home's electronic systems. For example, some touchscreens can serve as computer monitors and access the Internet. A screen might also display TV programs. Last but not least, it can become an invaluable piece of your home's security system by displaying images captured by security cameras.

Touchscreens come in a variety of shapes, sizes and styles. For a kitchen, you might choose a larger, TV-like touchscreen that mounts to the surface of a wall. Place it near the entry to the kitchen, and you can press its buttons as soon as you walk into the room. Alternatively, you could use a portable unit that can be carried from the workstation over to the breakfast nook, and anywhere in between.

The options certainly don't end there. A touchscreen can be tailored to present information in a way that you find visually engaging and intuitive. It can dispense complete chapters of information, from who left the house and when, to the weather forecast for the next seven days. Or, if you prefer, you can set it to display only a menu of a few meat-and-potatoes on/off buttons. However you choose to design it, a touchscreen puts a kitchen in the driver's seat of any home.

**The Keypad.** Of course, there's always a catch. Although the touchscreen prices are dropping, in most cases they are still the most expensive type of home-control interface. Less engaging but equally effective at managing a home's electronics are wall-mounted keypads. Buttons on a keypad can be engraved with any word or phrase you desire.

To complement their keypad and touchscreen control stations, most home-control manufacturers design their systems to also receive commands from any telephone inside or outside the house, as well as from any Internet-connected device such as a PDA or possibly the built-in screen of a refrigerator.

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