

# Digital eyes beef-

LOCAL WIRELESS  
EXPERT JANNIE VAN ZYL  
MONITORS HIS HOME  
FROM HIS CELLPHONE  
WHILE TRAVELLING  
ABROAD.

**T**he after-work traffic is gridlocked and home seems far away. Once you get there, you still have so much to do – turn on the lights, heating or air conditioning, run a nice, hot relaxing bath – and, if the cars in front of you don't start moving soon, you're going to miss your favourite television programme, for which you forgot to set the VCR.

Before your stress levels rocket, you can whip out your cellphone and - with no more than an SMS - perform all these tasks without even breaking a sweat.

A fully automated home was once the stuff of science fiction and fantasy, but technology has placed it all literally in the hands of homeowners. It's not that hard to imagine, when you consider it wasn't that long ago that we used to have to get out of our cars to open garage doors, or even to open the vehicle's petrol cap or bonnet.

Many homes already have various automated features, from security systems and irrigation to heating and lights, but they function independently, which is what Jannie van Zyl of Omnisolutions



# up home security



discovered when he was building his dream house in Platteklouf, Cape Town.

"We wanted an integrated, holistic approach which covered the entire spectrum, so we put out a tender but there was no-one who could do this," says Van Zyl, a self-confessed gadget freak - who went on to design and build the system himself.

Since then, his company has fully automated more than 30 homes in the Cape Town area, using a centralised intelligent controller to operate any number of independent applications.

These include lighting and power; audio and video; doors, gates and curtains; heating and cooling systems; pool pumps, water features and irrigation; and hot-water systems. Even a robotic vacuum cleaner can be included in the package.

But if there is one particular feature that a homeowner values above all others, it's security. With every system designed individually and taking personal lifestyle requirements into consideration, security can include CCTV, motion sensors and automated access at all points on the property, from exterior gates to interior doors.

An integrated system can be monitored and controlled through a variety of interfaces, such as a PC, wall-mounted or portable touch panels, through WAP, 3G or Wi-Fi, but perhaps the most convenient and innovative is through something millions of people already own - an ordinary cellphone or PDA.

When arriving at or leaving home, a simple code sent via SMS will deactivate or set the alarm system, but communication works both ways: when someone rings the doorbell at House Van Zyl, it is heard throughout the multilevel house. Touch screens immediately display CCTV images of the person outside, and Jannie's cellphone beeps with a received SMS as well as a captured image of the visitor, so the residents can take the appropriate action. The two-way SMS functionality will also alert the Van Zyls if the pool cover is activated, ensuring they are always aware of their children's safety.



In addition, stills and video streaming can be sent to the cellphones on request, no matter where in the world the Van Zyls are travelling, which means they can check in on their two young children at any time of the day or night - whether they are in Rome or Rondebosch.

With imagination being just about the only limit to what can be automated, smart homes are the wave of the future, although mainly for newly-built houses. "Existing homes can be retro-fitted, but people should bear in mind that it involves kilometres of wiring and conduits, which can be hard to disguise. It's much easier to plan for a new house," explains Van Zyl. "One should budget between five and seven percent of the project cost for automation, which can generally be recovered within five to seven years in terms of energy savings."

With lights that only go on when someone is in the room, water features which are turned off when the on-board weather station detects increased wind, and geysers that are switched on only when necessary, it's easy to see his point.

While full automation has become more accessible, not everyone can afford to go the whole hog. But knowing your home and your loved ones are secure is a good place to start.

"THE TRANSFERRING OF SECURITY VIDEO TO PARENTS' BLACKBERRY SMARTPHONES, CELLPHONES OR PDAS IS THE CURRENT TREND IN THE UK AND USA, AND WE HAVE BEGUN TO SEE THE ADOPTION OF THIS TREND IN THE LOCAL MARKET"



"Home users are starting to embrace and see the value in CCTV surveillance because of the low costs and high security," says Mark Chertkow, Managing Director of Graphic Image Technologies, local distributor of the SerVision video monitoring systems.

"The transferring of security video to parents' BlackBerry smartphones, cellphones or PDAs is the current trend in the UK and USA, and we have begun to see the adoption of this trend in the local market," says Chertkow.

"The main advantage of the SerVision system for families is that it is a system with professional levels of top quality video transmissions and the ability to broadcast video to mobile devices (BlackBerry smartphones, cellphone and PDA), allowing reception of live video and alerts anywhere and at any time."

SerVision recently release a new channel CCTV server, which allows remote viewing of video from homes and offices using GPRS, EDGE and 3G networks at a cost of just 5c per minute to view the video. It's a small price to pay for peace of mind. ■

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