Vivint Sky home automation system adapts to your way of life

By Nick Lavars // June 10, 2014

The Vivint Sky home automation system is centered on a 7-inch display and uses data analytics to learn about the user's lifestyle.

Channeling the many functions of the modern home into one centralized hub has been the focus of a growing number of home automation devices. With that said, many still rely on some form of manual control, be it through voice, touchscreen or gesture. Vivint is looking to ramp up the automation in home automation with Vivint Sky, a smart home system designed to learn and adapt to its users' habits.

"It is not that we expect manual control to disappear completely," Vice President of Innovation at Vivint, Jeremy Warren tells Gizmag. "There will be the odd situation where you break routine. But we need to make it more intuitive, enabling a better user experience on the manual part, then getting better and looking for opportunities to automate." At the heart of the Vivint Sky system is a wall-mounted, 7-inch capacitive touch display. This control panel features a 345 MHz radio for one-way communication with motion sensors around the home, Z-Wave for controlling battery-powered devices and Wi-Fi for peripherals such as security cameras. This display is supported by a Vivint Sky mobile app for iOS and Android. This enables the same functionality as the control panel, allowing users to remotely monitor and adjust settings in the home, whether it be turning on the cooling or receiving an alert if the garage door is opened. The app is also accessible from desktops and tablets.

In terms of manual control, the company touts this syndicated interface as a key strength of the system, along with security capabilities and an ability to stream high-definition video from installed cameras to the panel and devices.

"As one example, we can store 120 continuous days of video footage on the hard drive," explains Warren. "Combined with motion sensors installed around the home, you can configure the system to save events such as a door opening or golf clubs being taken from the garage. This way if something untoward occurs, there's no need to sort through hours of footage. You can flick through the events and easily find out what happened."

With a surge in internet-connected devices anticipated over the next decade, Vivint Sky joins a growing list of start-ups and larger companies scrambling for position to leverage the so-called Internet of Things. Examples include the recently crowdfunded Alyt, which enables smart home control via voice commands, and the Ninja Sphere, which allows your gestures to turn up the heat or flick off the lights. Samsung also announced its Smart Home app in April this year, not long after Google snapped up smart thermostat company Nest. In short, things are really starting to cook in the smart home space.

Much like Nest, Vivint's approach is two-fold, though it extends the functionality beyond regulating temperature in the home. It is aiming to provide an enhanced manual control experience while simultaneously familiarizing a system with the user's habits so they need not pull out their phone to tweak things.

With sensors installed at the home's entrances, for example, Vivint Sky can learn what time of day you leave and return, sending an alert to your phone when the house might be empty asking if you would like to lock your doors. "Having these sensors allows us to do more predictive modeling and adjust to the user's habits," says Warren. As for how long this takes, Vivint puts the timeframe between two and four weeks, though it will depend on factors such as how many devices are installed and patterns of activity.

Vivint Sky also operates on a separate Wi-Fi network to that of the house, with the company claiming all communications to be protected by encryption in a bid to offer a more secure service.

"The fact is, I can pick up my phone and unlock this door or turn on that light switch, but this is not smart, it is remote," says Warren. "We think the solution is to streamline things, and the way we are attacking this is with really smart data analytics."

In contrast to most home automation systems on the market, Vivint offers ongoing contracts rather than a one off purchase. Vivint says the typical contract length is 60 months, with basic options starting at US$54 per month including a control panel with smoke detectors and window and motion sensors, while the $70 package adds security features such as door locks, video control and also smart thermostats to the mix. Offering an ongoing service is central to Vivint's vision for ushering in the connected home.

"We think there is a lot of friction that is preventing adoption," says Warren. "We want the least amount of friction as possible. Not 'look at this cool new gadget', but making it about sales and service, meaning that you pay us each month for the service and we will make sure it works."