

How the Home Kit Fits In

The Implications of Apple's Latest Move into the Home

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At Apple's World Wide Developer's Conference held in San Francisco in early June, Apple made a long-anticipated announcement about its plans for the network-connected home. Every time Apple makes a move, it is imperative that our industry fully understands the implications of these announcements because our clients will be asking us about the relevance of these products for the integrated technology home solutions that we design, sell, and support.

Last month's Home Kit software development kit introduction presented a set of programming tools that will be released when the next version of Apple's mobile iOS platform, Version 8, ships later this fall. According to Apple's presentation, Home Kit will allow manufacturers that

develop smart home products with app control (such as Philips Hue and the Chamberlain line of garage door openers) to communicate with one another over the Home Kit platform. Those companies that write their application software to be compatible with Home Kit will give them access to the following features:

- The ability to communicate with other Home Kit compatible applications. For instance, a good-night scene programmed in the iOS 8 Home Kit could turn off the Philips Hue lights and make sure the Chamberlain-controlled garage door is closed.
- A level of security that could be managed by only those with fingerprint authentication on the new iPhones.
- The addition of Siri voice activation to the control of these smart products.
- Geofencing and iBeacon technologies—location-aware technologies that can initiate an action in an application based on the location of the iOS device, such as turning on landscape lights when an iPhone in a car approaches a home.
- Grouping of product services into homes, rooms, and zones.

These are significant new feature sets that could greatly enhance the smart home systems that we currently deploy in our clients' homes. One of the main arguments against multi-application based homes is that it is difficult to provide a level of automation across applications. Those vendors that implement HomeKit compatibility in their software can overcome that limitation. The addition of Siri voice control opens up a whole new range of control possibilities that augment the touch of an app with control with one's voice. These new features will have a significant impact on our home technology design solutions that we offer our clients.

It is very important to note, however, that the success of Apple's new HomeKit platform will be based on the number of premium home technology companies that will agree to update their software to take advantage of these Home Kit features. The premium home technology companies that I am referring to include companies such as Lutron, Sonos, Nest, and many others that provide very rich and reliable hardware and software experiences for our clients with their own hardware and software. None of these companies appeared on Apple's early adopter list of Home Kit partners, and it is unclear that they will want to implement Home Kit in their software. These companies may choose to continue to control their own destiny and add many of Home Kit's software features to their own upgraded software releases.

In addition, there is still a large and growing Android market for app control of the home that will continue to be a competing standard, and many smart home technology manufacturers may choose to focus their software efforts on enhanced compatibility with the Android platform over Apple's Home Kit.

There is also the general concern that Apple clearly exerts a tremendous amount of control over their ecosystem partners. That has been a benefit in that it assures a level of quality control for all third-party products that run on Apple operating systems, but it can also restrict the level of innovation that these third-party companies may wish to include in their hardware and software solutions.

Like all new platform announcements, they only have meaning if the significant players in the market commit to support a given platform.

Obviously, when a company with Apple's dominance in the phone and tablet markets makes an announcement like HomeKit, it is potentially a very significant announcement for our industry. But they will face formidable opposition from Google, Microsoft, and Samsung's connected home initiatives, some of the most highly capitalized companies in the world.

One thing is certain: the connected home space is now front-page news. Dominance of this market is in the crosshairs of many of the largest companies in the world. As integrators of home technology for our clients' homes we will all benefit from the increased awareness that these home technology solutions can provide. It is up to our industry to decide for our clients what we think will best fit their needs in this exciting new "internet of things" connected world in the home.



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