

Electronic Locks: Opening the Doors to Smart Home Sales?

Suddenly the lock is not just another aesthetic upgrade

By: David Seeman, Guest Contributor



There was a time when door locks were far down list of features that could entice new-home customers and separate one home from the next. Traditionally, the most effective way to reach a homebuyer's heart would be through the kitchen or the bathroom. For most homebuyers, a lock was just a lock.

But today, homebuyers and homebuilders are seeing locks a little differently. With the increasing popularity and affordability of home automation technology, smart electronic locks that are wireless and battery-powered are becoming difference-making features.

What's the Buzz?

The top two buzzwords today among savvy homebuilders are arguably "green" and "digital." Green homes are all about energy efficiency and saving money in ways that make homebuyers feel they're making a positive contribution to the planet.

There's an increasingly popular and ever-growing list of devices that manage and monitor energy consumption. Energy-use monitors provide a snapshot of the homeowner's energy consumption. Geothermal heating systems are on the cusp of taking off. And for years, energy-efficient washers, dryers, dishwashers, refrigerators and other appliances have been big attractions. Ultimately, homebuyers feel like they can afford "more home" when they're saving money on electricity.

The "digital" home, replete with home automation devices and a central control system, is right behind the green home in terms of industry buzz and consumer excitement. Digital homes are more than just sexy: they deliver interoperability of home electronics from control panels and mobile devices like smartphones in ways that enhance security, convenience, comfort and overall livability. In digital homes, devices like alarms, lighting, thermostats and entertainment systems—as well as locks—all communicate with each other and provide maximum control along with a trail of information.

In their earlier iterations, home automation systems were viewed as complicated and expensive, because in most cases they were. They were an installer's dream, responsible for racking up many man-hours of wiring and connection work. But in recent years, these networked systems have become simpler to install and use (even for the do-it-yourselfer), more modular for adapting to changing needs and, perhaps most importantly, more affordable.

One of the most sought-after elements of today's digital home among homebuyers is the electronic lock. This is a dramatic change from the days when the primary competitive advantages for a door lock were quality, style, finish and price. While these traits are still important, the role that smart locks can play in a digital home has pushed this once-humble device into an entirely new level of desirability.

Evolutionary Advantages

Over the last five or six years, there have been huge technological advances in the world of door locks, each of which has increased the value of locks as an effective home-sales tool.

Best Practices for Builders

- **Optimize lock functionality through connected home platform selection. Not all platforms are the same and builders should invest due diligence here to ensure that the right benefits are delivered to their homebuyers.**
- **Overall look, style and finish still matter to homeowners when selecting electronic locks .**
- **Local authentication at the lock when there is loss of battery power or connectivity**

Advanced technology provides the flexibility for homeowners to “re-key” their own locks quickly and easily, without having to remove the locks from the door.

Electronic locks take the key, and the possibility of losing it or having it stolen, out of the equation. Enter a personal code with the push of a few buttons and you can enter your home. You can also assign temporary codes to select individuals such as home contractors, granting them access for specific lengths of time.

With smart locks and home connectivity technology, your locks can wirelessly communicate with other devices in your home. And you can remotely communicate with and control your lock.

The advantages to homebuilders of this third technological advance are dramatic. Most homebuilders recognize that the ability to control your home electronics from the front door and grant home access from anywhere in the country or even the world is a significant selling tool. Suddenly, the lock is not just another aesthetic upgrade, like flooring or faucets. To a certain buyer—often younger and more tech-savvy—the smart lock can be a very desirable feature.

The Y Factor

In fact, as Generation Y (most commonly defined as children of the 1980s) begins to comprise a higher percentage of new homebuyers, home connectivity technology and smart locks will become even more important differentiators for home developers. A number of large developers have recognized this and have created communities geared toward people in their 20s and early 30s with layouts suited to younger buyers, singles and young families. These homes feature open floor plans, energy efficiency, less formal spaces and more functional elements.

Some of these homes also come with pre-installed home automation systems. These systems, with features such as smart locks, are a way to add the bells and whistles to homes that younger buyers may want, while remaining in their price range.

As this Generation Y becomes more informed about products like smart locks and home connectivity systems, they are likely going to force the hands of homebuilders. They’ll demand the latest and greatest home automation products that allow them to control everything in the home with their phones and tablets, including their door locks.

Are Builders at Home With Smart Locks?

If homebuilders aren’t comfortable with electronic door locks yet, they soon will be. The builder’s number one focus is constructing a house that people want to live in—at the right price. While it’s true that some builders are more reticent to embrace change, all want a competitive advantage. When price and location are similar, most builders welcome any element that will make their home more appealing and stand out. Many builders become more comfortable with electronic door locks when they realize that some of these automated lock advances are coming from the same companies that builders have traditionally turned to for door knobs, door levers, deadbolts, handles, and other door hardware. They know that they’re not sacrificing quality for electronic bells and whistles.

In the end, it is the consumer who will drive the increased use of home automation and smart locks. It’s highly likely that once people have smart locks on their doors, they will never return to standard locks. When they move into their next homes, they will be looking for high levels of automated connectivity; in fact, they may be looking for upgrades to that. And with exciting features like Bluetooth-operated locks on the horizon, technology-craving homebuyers will not have to wait long.

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Key Features to Look for:

- Keyless entry.
- Backlit keypads.
- Ability to unlock doors remotely from smartphone, tablet or computer.
- Scheduling and entry code-setting for visitors such as contractors to unlock doors only during certain times.
- Text alerts when someone enters or an alarm triggers.
- Easy re-keying without replacing cylinder.
- Connectivity to home control system to connect and sync with cameras, security system to set locks when armed, or activate lights, thermostats, even whole-house music when someone enters the house.
- New methods of authentication at the door versus a traditional key, such as smartphone, key fobs, keypad, etc.
- Emerging technologies, such as: Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and NFC (Near Field Communications) for keyless entry and authentication. Also watch for biometric activation via fingerprint scanning.