

The Digital Home of the Future

Your home has changed very little in the last 40 years. Central heating, washing machines and colour TVs were all part of the 1960s.

My home is much different – but I am a total freak! My home is networked. I have networks for the distribution of flammable gasses, water, power, lighting, video & audio (plus control of both) and a network for security systems. I have computer networks via cables, 802.11 wireless, Bluetooth, Infra-red links etc. I even have a network for the distribution of telephony – I can pick up a phone in any room and dial any other room! The latter is a boon to my life – I live alone..... I told you I was a freak.

I see more changes over the next 10 years in way we communicate and pass information than we have experience over the previous 150 years.

I see your TV of the future becoming a very powerful digital computer. (You will still call it a TV though). It is more likely to be a number of very powerful computers networked together and linked by low power wireless networks. I see everything plugging into a hub-computer on a shelf under the stairs (video, DVD, audio, phones, internet – everything) and then being distributed effortlessly to all parts of the home. Large flat screens will become the norm, and for most of the time they will be “moving art” – but instantly they will change to be a display of incoming information or video-link etc. At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January '06, 108” flat screens were demonstrated – that is 8 ½ feet! Nearly 3 metres! These are being produced to display High Definition TV, and if they are being made that size – then the current models of 38” or so will be in the high street for £50 or less

Other announcements last month suggested that the computer platform will soon be able to handle still images and moving pictures better than your TV! I see in the near future you will be able to address the screen (it will have one of the new ViiV (a trademark of Intel) computers behind it) and ask what entertainment you have stored and it will show you not only the its own content, but that of the machines in the lounge or kitchen. It will also, without your instruction show you the content currently available on the new Google VideoStore.

With the development of SIP (Session Initiation Protocols), parts of your home network will automatically reconfigure themselves to give new services. For example, just imagine that your door bell is SIP enabled. When someone arrives at the door and rings the bell, it initiates the process of the security camera taking a picture, the location network detects you in the bathroom and your shaving mirror changes from your image of you to the one of the person at the front door! You can even have a conversation without putting the razor down.

Looking at the Future Slightly Differently

All items in the home already contain one or more microprocessors, soon they will be network ready and start using your new information networks. The washing machine will know that it needs maintenance, and will call the service agent who, in turn, will negotiate with your on-line electronic diary for a convenient time. So the machine gets mended before it disgorges soapy water all over the kitchen floor.

“How will I cope?” I hear you asking with a slight tremble in your voice. Well, the answer is simple – easily! When was the last time you plugged a 13 amp plug into the wall and marveled that electrons came out of the hole. You never think of how the electricity gets to the plug or water to the tap. In the home of the future you will give even less thought to how the information gets to the screen or the sound system. You will only get annoyed when there is a delay in getting it there.

And in this new world there will be easy access to information from the home. In the AORTA world (Always On Real Time Access) you will be connected at all times to everything – seamlessly and effortlessly.

Frightening? Well not really. Can you remember the day in 1986 when you first saw a man walking down the High Street, carrying a half-house brick on his shoulder – AND he has talking to it? At the time that was bewildering, just an expensive yuppie toy that will never be part of my life! Well, who these days does not have at least one mobile phone? In fact the worst punishment for a teenager these days is not being sent to their room, but disconnected from their information world.

We are all very adaptable and soon we will wonder how we ever managed to cope without these new, networked devices.