

# KEEPING AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

The SmartRoom helps clients understand the role of home automation and provides installers with the opportunity to up-sell their services. **Paul Tatnell** talks to its creator.

**S**martRoom captures the world of home automation into one showroom. Set up in the renowned Domayne shopping complex in Bundall, Queensland, its creator, Eric Sagmiester of Focus Automation, believes its initiatives could signal a change in the way a home automation business is run.

SmartRoom evolved from frustration and necessity. Stuck in a world of uneducated clients, too many products and endless competition, Eric decided to design a solution that wasn't focused on aggressive sales tactics but on ensuring that the public understood home automation – and if they were in fact interested, he could then assist.

"The SmartRoom is a good opportunity for interested people to get involved with a smart house with no added pressure of having a salesperson breathing down your neck.

"The original idea regarding home automation was that only informed people buy smart home products. The SmartRoom offers a delivery platform in order to educate ordinary people into the potential of what digital technologies and convergence can do," Eric explains.

Situated in a busy shopping complex, the SmartRoom is becoming increasingly popular. Eric says that his showroom is very important to the home automation industry as it acts an



Eric Sagmiester believes installers can benefit from being part of a cluster of leading business and technologies.

educational tool where only the best products are recommended, and customers can get advice without the fear of being ripped off.

"There has been a lot of interest so far as people know that this type of technology is coming and they want to see how it actually works," he says.

"There is also a comfort zone for the customer

as Domayne is a recognised and trusted complex. We filter through people who then come out an educated customer and more importantly, they have an entry into the industry."

Eric has also developed an online questionnaire where interested parties simply list their needs and ideas which he then matches with the most suitable technologies and set-up.

"We also visualise the concept so that an educated customer doesn't really have to go to a premises. If you fill out our questionnaire, we will then cross-match it with the suitable products and services and, if they wish, we then provide and install the products for them."

While the complex provides the public with a gateway to the amazing yet sometimes daunting world of home automation, Eric believes that installers should look at his SmartRoom idea as an initiative towards securing their position within a competitive industry.

Eric's belief is that an installer should align themselves with a 'cluster' of relevant technologies and businesses – especially retailers – to provide customers with an entry point package into the home automation industry.

"If an installer is associated with a retail outlet, the customer knows that they have a venue or point of contact that will probably still be there in five years, unlike some tradesmen! The package deal offered within the SmartRoom and other retailers, which involves installation, is a tempter for the customer and I believe that's the way most things will be sold," Eric explains.

According to Eric, getting onboard with a number of relevant businesses provides installers with the opportunity to stay ahead of the market in regards to new technologies or installation techniques, and therefore helps them to remain competitive.

"Business clusters are a way of the future as



The SmartRoom provides the public with a gateway to the world of home automation and aims to help installers secure their position within a competitive industry.



The turn-key communications network and utility metering solution, Spiderbox, is just one of several companies and technologies on show in the SmartRoom.

it's the only way to stay efficient and up to date," Eric explains.

"These clusters will have to work together because the industry moves so fast that not one entity can actually do the job alone. Clustering has been going on in New Zealand with great results and is an excellent way to get business going," he says.

According to Eric, installers working within a cluster will earn a customer's trust quicker as people are more willing to put their trust in a retailer than a single entity. As Eric explains, retailers and associated technologies will also benefit as they could direct their work to a trusted source.

"I believe that the American 'Wall Mart' approach to turn-key sales and installations will grow in Australia as long as they utilise tradesmen who reflect a professional manner.

"Unfortunately, there are no qualifications that can differentiate professionals from cowboys and at the end of the day, any poor jobs will reflect back on the retailer," he says.

"A symbiotic relationship, where both parties rely on each other to deliver the solution, is the best," Eric continues. "The installer can rely on the retailer for leads and quality products while the installer can be trusted to perform a professional job backed by a warranty."

The SmartRoom is an excellent example of the installer benefiting from being part of a cluster of leading business and technologies. Groups within the cluster include Eric's own Focus Automation, a leading installation company, and Spiderbox, a turn-key communications network and utility metering solution. Other companies and technologies include BE-HOME, Smart Cabling, JBL speakers, Smartway, Fermax EGI, Air Web Connect and national retailer, Domayne.

"Credibility is the big thing we (Focus Automation) have got from being associated with the SmartRoom concept," says Eric. "Customers feel comfortable to engage our services over the phone when we tell them that we have a technology demonstration suite in Domayne. Customer perception of us as a professional company is enhanced by the fact that we are associated with a high profile retailer and we expect the upcoming marketing push of the SmartRoom by Domayne to benefit both parties," he adds. ■

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