

Hello house! The connected home needs fibre connectivity

The Consumer Electronics Show indicates that 2014 will be the year when connected devices will generate increased demand for fibre to the home.

By Nadia Babaali, Communications Director, FTTH Council Europe

If all you want to do is email your boss or look at funny cat pictures on the web then today's broadband will probably serve you well enough. But the Internet is capable of doing so much more in terms of productivity and entertainment.

Nowhere is the Internet's potential more apparent than at the Consumer Electronics Show held in Las Vegas in January each year. The annual gadget show throws a spotlight on technologies that could be coming to your home in the near future.

Major themes at this year's show included 4k Ultra HD TV with razor-sharp pictures thanks to a resolution that is four times that of typical 1080p HD TVs. Also mooted to be the next big thing are 3D printers, which allow anyone to create an object simply by downloading a design from the Internet. Another trend highlighted was the connected and smart home. From televisions to toothbrushes, it seems there is no device that isn't worth connecting.

Pundits confidently predict that 2014 is the year when connected home devices will hit the mainstream. They point to the fact that major firms like Google are getting behind home automation technology – as evidenced by the search giant's recent agreement to pay \$3.2 billion for the start-up Nest, which makes a smart thermostat that learns its owner's behaviour.

Our prediction is that these products will also generate increased demand for fibre to the home connections. In fact, they may not reach their potential without them.

Right now, connected home technology is mainly (although not exclusively) the domain of the more affluent home owner, but the appeal is growing. As the market matures, it will drive down prices, making connected home services accessible to the average consumer. Government incentives to conserve energy will also push connected devices into millions more homes across Europe.

Although an individual device may not need a lot of bandwidth, the sheer number of devices in every home will place unprecedented demands on the network. Connected home devices use outgoing bandwidth (from the user to the network), which is often poorly specified in current broadband networks. Low latency (minimal time delay) and network resilience (the ability to maintain an acceptable quality of service, even when faults occur in the network) are also important requirements for many "smart" applications. It is dangerous to assume that the current broadband access networks can support the massive increase in online activity happening in every home.

And some emerging applications WILL need a lot of bandwidth. Producers of Ultra HD TV are looking at how they can get their content to consumers. 4k movies can require more than 100GB of storage – which is far in excess of the 25GB capacity of a single-layer Blu-ray disk and the 4.7GB available on a DVD. Manufacturers are counting on online distribution, but will this be practical if it takes hours (and your entire monthly bandwidth quota) to download a single movie?

The connected home will need better connectivity. The connected home will need fibre.

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The FTTH Council Europe is an industry organisation with a mission to accelerate the availability of fibre-based, ultra-high-speed access networks to consumers and businesses. The Council promotes this technology because it will deliver a flow of new services that enhance the quality of life, contribute to a better environment and increase economic competitiveness. The FTTH Council Europe consists of more than 150 member companies.

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