

# Automating Your Home

**O**nce upon a time, before the advent of electricity, home automation had a different name: servants. Today you can have a Gosford Park all your own, starting at \$25 (to click one light on and off from the next room) and ranging up to \$100,000 (for control of home and garden lighting, drapes that close at dusk, and a Jacuzzi that fills and warms up as you approach the driveway). Added bonus: These servants don't gossip. Yet.

You can set up your home or apartment with a comfortable level of automation for well under \$1,000. That's the good news. The news you may not like quite as much is that the 800-pound gorilla of home automation is X10 ([www.x10.com](http://www.x10.com)), the company you probably first heard of through its annoying pop-up ads. (Its online store is just as garish.) Bear in mind that others, including Leviton ([leviton.com](http://leviton.com)), RadioShack.com, and Stanley ([stanleyworks.com](http://stanleyworks.com)), also sell X10 devices (it's a technological spec, not just a brand name). An X10 automation system works over your home's power lines, sending a coded pulse that tells a device to turn on, turn off, or dim itself.

Starter kits (\$50) let you automate four or five lamps or appliances. You plug each lamp into a module that plugs into the wall

outlet. Then you can turn on, turn off, or dim the devices with a countertop control pad that plugs into a wall outlet, a walk-around wireless remote, an on-off timer that looks like a clock radio, or your PC. A key-chain remote even lets you turn on two sets of lights as you pull into the driveway.

## [TIPS]

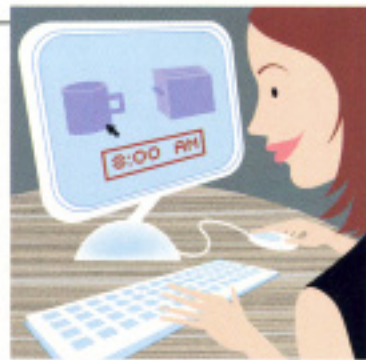
**AUGMENT YOUR SECURITY** Most home automation devices can be wired into your security system. If the alarm sounds, outside lights can flash; if the fire alarm goes off, hallway lighting turns on to help you get out.

**AUTOMATE THE RIGHT THINGS** Never automate a device that's dangerous if it goes on and stays on inadvertently. Your coffeemaker may shut off after an hour; your space heater may not. You don't want to start a fire.

**VERIFY YOUR SETUP** With X10 2-Way technology there's feedback that the light or appliance got your signal; with previous versions, you had to just send the command a couple of times and hope it worked.

**DON'T BE AFRAID** Over its 25-year life, X10 technology has become more reliable. If you know someone who had bad luck during the Bush years (the first Bush, that is), don't be put off. These days, options include controlling your home via telephone touch-tones.

## [SCENES] Even without a soup-to-nuts home network you can fulfill some of your couch-potato fantasies.



### THE SETUP

An inexpensive kit such as X10's \$50 ActiveHome uses your existing power lines. Set up all your lights and appliances via a PC interface just once.



### BLISS

All your appliances will turn on and off at the appropriate times without your having to lift a finger. A dawn and dusk feature syncs lighting to the sunset.