

THE 5 BIGGEST PROBLEMS WITH SMART HOMES (AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM)

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Very soon it is going to be almost impossible to find non-smart devices and appliances.

Like black & white televisions, floppy disks and other obsolete technology, your lights that don't connect to the internet will soon become harder to replace.

Your fridge and coffee maker are soon going to feel outdated too as will most of the appliances you have in your home.

Sooner or later the smart home revolution will reach everyone, whether you like it or not.

But even as we dive headlong into a future that we've been promised is magical in terms of utter convenience, there are a lot of troubling questions we've yet to get satisfactory answers for. Concerns that remain to be solved.

I'm not saying that these issues could doom the smart home industry – short of an apocalypse, it is unstoppable – but they could cause a lot of problems especially for homeowners.

If you are thinking about joining the smart bandwagon, here are the 5 main problems you should be prepared to encounter with tips to help you deal with them.

1. PRIVACY



A smart home is essentially a big interconnected computer system. You have your smart WiFi thermostats connected to your lights connected to your cameras and so on. And as with anything digital, it can be hacked.

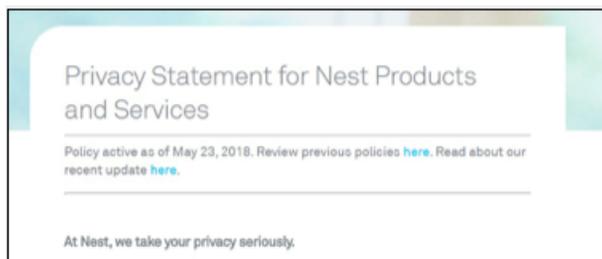
It's one thing for your phone or computer to get hacked. It's another one for someone to take control of the cameras, thermostat or baby monitor in your home. It could end very badly.

While companies like Amazon and Google make a lot of effort to make their smart home hubs secure, they are not foolproof.

Researchers have already proven that smart homes can be hacked, quite easily in fact. Sometimes as easily as a Google search.

What to do about it: Use devices from trusted brands that take security seriously. Also make sure you practice common sense security precautions – strong password, secure network etc.

2. DATA HANDLING



Another big privacy-related worry a lot of people and experts have is what companies are doing with all the data they are collecting from our homes.

To make smart homes work, smart devices have to collect lots of data. Smart thermostats like Nest know when you leave home and when you come back.

A smart fridge may know when you are out of certain groceries. Your smart Roomba vacuum cleaner has a map of your home's layout.

The amount and depth of data collected will only increase as we add more smart devices to our homes. Do you know what the company is doing with that data?

Of course they use it to make the device work better. But others might sell it to third parties who might use it to show you targeted advertising.

What to do about it: Always read the privacy policy of a smart product or service before you use it. If you are comfortable with their policies, go ahead and install the product.

3. COMPATIBILITY

Currently we are still in the wild west of smart devices.

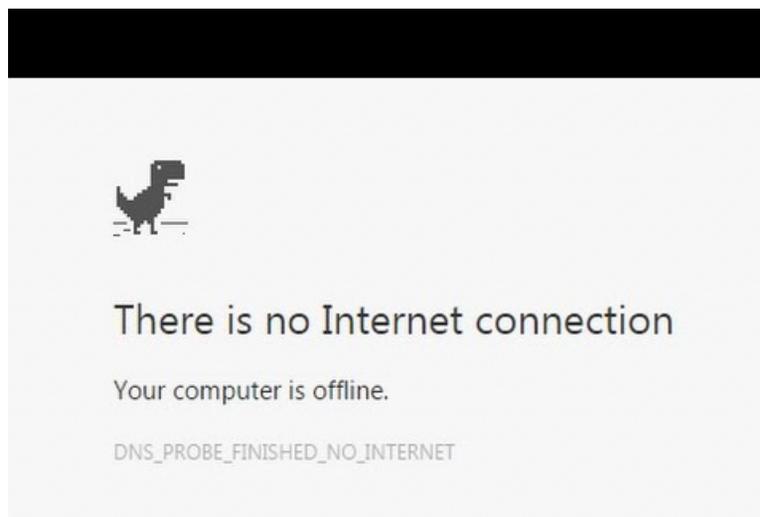
There are so many platforms and standards all with varying specifications. This is a big problem for consumers.

It limits your options and you always have to double-check whether that new smart device you are about to buy will work with your smart home system.

Things are getting better with the introduction of smart home hubs that can work with Alexa, Google Assistant, IFTTT and HomeKit among other smart home platforms. But it's often tedious to set up cross-compatibility and it's not as reliable.

What to do about it: There isn't much you can do about it other than stick to one platform. If you use an Alexa smart speaker for instance, stick to Alexa-compatible devices.

4. RELIABILITY WHEN OFFLINE



In March 2017, when Amazon's massive cloud service went offline. It not only brought down numerous websites with it, it also affected cloud-connected smart home devices.

Some people were left in the dark, unable to switch on their smart lights. Others couldn't operate their home alarm system, garage door and smart TVs.

This total dependency on connectivity will become even more problematic the more we rely on smart devices to run our homes and lives.

What to do about it: For essential devices like smart WiFi thermostats and lights, make sure you buy those with a local option. That is, they can continue operating even without an internet connection.

5. NEW BRANDS

Smart devices are generally pricey compared to non-smart alternatives. So it would be a big waste of money if one day the device became a very expensive paperweight. That's what happened to customers of Bluesmart smart luggage, Revolv smart home hub, Sense sleep trackers and other smart devices whose makers suddenly went out of business.

Without company support, these devices become useless.

This problem is common with startups that start out well but for one reason or another, run out of fumes and close down.

What to do about it: Buy from established brands that you are sure will be around for a long time. Avoid Kickstarter products until they have been in the market for at least a couple of years.

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