

Smart Gifts

Latest gadgets not only make life easier, but are cool family toys, too



By Sharon Jayson

Whether you're searching for the perfect present or want to treat yourself this holiday season, there are some cool gadgets and luxury items among the latest innovations for the connected home.

Companies worldwide are creating these connected products.



Some market their convenience while others are designed to impress with a "wow" factor. Products designed to simplify life include controllers for a variety of pre-programmed home "scenes," which are ways that consumers can set into motion a variety of actions that affect more than one electronic system. Examples include a "goodbye" scene to turn off lights, lock doors and set a thermostat temperature or a "goodnight" scene to turn off lights, lock doors and activate the security system.

Fibaro Home Intelligence, a company based in Poznan, Poland, is marketed mostly in Asia and Europe, said spokeswoman Monica Dolecka. But now, "we're slowly tapping into the American market and are targeting more of a DIY market." Its products work mainly with Z-Wave, a wireless communications system used for home automation.

The **FIBARO SWIPE** is a gesture-control pad (\$149.99) equipped with a 3D motion-detecting sensor. It looks like a picture frame and can hang on the wall, sit on a counter or be hidden from sight. It pulls double duty by displaying photos while recognizing six hand gestures that control various connected home devices. Program it for lights, window blinds or any number of actions. Swipe to the left to prepare coffee; move your hand to the right and the bathtub fills with hot water. It's also marketed as an easy solution for some older adults who have difficulty navigating technology but can do the hand gestures.



fibaro.com

Fibaro Swipe looks and acts like a picture frame but can control connected devices.

Two very new portable scene controllers from Fibaro are **THE BUTTON** (\$49.99) and the KeyFob (not yet priced). The Button, which comes in eight colors and can run up to five scenes, just became available in the U.S. last month. KeyFob is not officially launched but is expected to be available in early 2017.

"This would be best for somebody who's always on the go and they're trying to simplify their life because they're busy," the Fibaro spokeswoman said. "This is for the mom or dad before they're arriving home who wants to have their garage door open and doors unlocked so they don't have to fumble for their keys. This is essentially a key replacement."

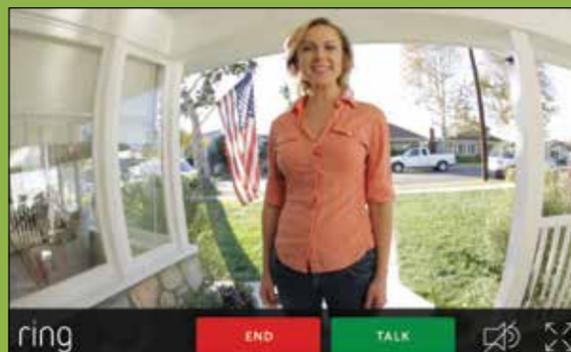


fibaro.com

The Button, a light, portable battery-powered scene controller, fits in the palm of your hand.

When visitors arrive, the video doorbell is particularly handy because you can see or speak to anyone from your smartphone or tablet and don't need to be there. The **RING VIDEO DOORBELL** (\$199) can replace a current doorbell or be used in a spot where one wasn't previously located.

Each doorbell is equipped with an HD camera with night vision and smart motion detection.



bluebonnet.coop

Ring Video Doorbell lets you welcome guests even when away from home.

ring.com



ozobot.com

For the little ones, smart gift options include **EDWIN THE DUCK** (\$99.99) for newborns, toddlers and preschoolers and **OZO-BOT BIT** (\$59) for ages six and older. Edwin is an app-connected smart toy with a built-in night light that can also be tossed into the tub to measure water temperature and it can play music or bedtime sounds. The Bit is a programmable smart robot for playing and learning that can build creativity and coding skills.



edwintheduck.com

FAR LEFT: Consider Ozobot Bit, an app-connected smart toy, for children 6 and older.

LEFT: Edwin the Duck is a hit with newborns, toddlers and preschoolers.

Inside your home, there are new options for those who can't get enough television. Two companies based in the Midwest are among those specializing in vanishing TV mirrors, which serve as decorative mirrors until they are turned on and become screens.

"It's a definite wow factor," said Cindy Petersen, of ClearView TV Mirrors from the Chicago suburb Elk Grove, Ill.

The pricey **VANISHING TV MIRRORS** are designed to be a more aesthetically pleasing option for home décor, whether for living areas (where some consider a flat screen television to be unsightly) or for bathrooms (where a vanity mirror

can also serve as a TV.) Neither company sells directly to consumers. Their products are available through designers, architects and installers. The mirror-screens come in custom sizes but also some standard sizes.

"This is a really nice framed mirror when it's off and it reflects the room. You don't see a TV," Petersen said. "You don't know there's a TV unless you click on your remote."

Séura, based in Green Bay, Wis., offers a 19" TV in a 33 inch x 36 inch size mirror with no frame for \$3,299. The cost for a frameless entertainment mirror for living areas with a 55" 4K UHD TV is \$8,499.



seura.com

Vanishing TV mirrors, like this one from Séura, aren't yet sold directly to consumers but can be purchased from designers, architects and installers.

The ultimate luxury — at a minimum of \$50,000 — is a high-end golf simulation product that allows users to play 15 additional sports on the same system. Toronto-based company Visual Sports' **SWINGTRACK** offers a truly customized product, said marketing manager Chris Lee.

Basements or media rooms are typically needed, with minimum space requirements of 9.5 foot ceilings and rooms at least 12 feet wide with a depth of 15-to-20-feet, Lee said.

"You tell us the size of the space and our team of designers will come up with a simple drawing and send that off to you for your approval," he said. "Once it's approved, it takes six to eight weeks for us to manufacture all the custom components."

A team of specialists would "install everything you need in the space — everything from the turf flooring, the projector, the sound system — all of our technology that makes all that possible, and train you at the same time."

The sports simulation options include baseball, basketball, bocce, cricket, football, hockey, rugby and soccer. "It's not just for mom or dad," Lee said. "You're using real sports equipment and you're physically running around with a soccer ball or throwing a baseball. It turns our product into a family product."



visualsportssys.com



A luxury item for the home, the SwingTrack offers sports simulation and equipment for the family.

These are only a few of many new options available to consumers as the smart home industry — now in its infancy — takes off in a big way and sets out to change our day-to-day lives.