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# Networking sets everything at your fingertips

**Beverley Head**

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A home network allows the user to control most of the sound, lighting and video from a personal computer or remote control, writes Beverley Head.

There's a cupboard in David Leisk's Sydney apartment that bristles with electronics. It's the digital nerve centre of his home, but can be accessed from any room.

The multi-room audio system, the home entertainment system networked to a computer, the lighting system (including a range of pre-programmed lighting moods), a wall-mounted plasma screen and two liquid crystal displays (LCD) are all hooked up.

With MP3 files and DVDs stored on the computer's hard drive, Leisk can control most of his lighting, audio and video from his computer or even the remote control.

"I've got a push button on the remote which allows me to access certain functions on the PC - so I can access all my photos and have a modern-day slide show on the plasma screen linked to the sound system," he says.

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Underpinning the network is a CBus2 control and management system to run the lighting system and a CAT5 cable backbone throughout the apartment which links individual devices. While Leisk's home is largely wired, he does see a mix of wired and wireless networks being installed to connect computing equipment to entertainment gear.

Leisk is managing director of Sydney-based business David Leisk Electronics, and says demand for hybrid computer and entertainment networks is on the rise - especially in prestige homes. "It becomes almost a yardstick to measure a luxury home," says Leisk. "If the house is worth over \$1 million it will have something."

His company designs and installs home technology networks which can be controlled using either LCD touch screens, remote controllers or personal computers.

If clients wish, their home network can also be linked into Leisk's company network, which is then able to remotely change a lighting or temperature setting, trigger a garden sprinkling system or troubleshoot many equipment or network problems as required.

Communications specialist Cisco has long talked up the potential of home networking and the advantages of so-called smart homes.

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now stands at one in six.

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According to IDC Australia analyst Sophie Lo the most popular home network in Australia is the personal computer to personal computer network which usually shares a broadband connection.

Only about 10 per cent of home networks feature consumer electronics linked to the PC, she says.

"It is still very complex to connect a PC to consumer electronics," Lo warns.

Content is increasingly being digitised and stored on computers and she says consumers will want to network the devices and the challenge for electronics manufacturers will be to make the task easier.

The computer itself is becoming more of an entertainment platform, with multimedia systems that can be used to play DVDs and listen to music gaining popularity.

"We see home networking five years behind broadband. By 2010, 33 per cent of (Australian) homes will have networks, which is where broadband is today," Lo says.

In the US, according to Forrester Research, the average home network already has more than five gadgets attached. Like Australia, most of these are currently traditional computing devices such as scanners and printers.

But gradually entertainment systems, such as Apple's AirPort Express or the Roku

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"At least one in five home networkers shows PC-based photos on her TV set or plays PC-based music on her home stereo, and more than one in six connect a game console," according to the firm.

It also notes that the longer the home has been networked, the more devices are attached, and more entertainment options added.

For Leisk the networked home system he has installed impresses a lot of people. Is it essential?

"No, but it's a nice thing to have," he says.

Button pusher

\* Once a home is networked, a consumer can set up a television recording over the internet.

\* In Australia, about one in every 16 homes has a home network.

\* The most popular home network in Australia remains the PC to PC network.



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