



Where to now?

With home automation firmly entrenched in the Dubai real estate market, neighbouring countries are starting to benefit from the overflow. Can it be sustained? Paul Skelton reports.

Dubai has undoubtedly become synonymous with the burgeoning home automation industry in the MEA. It is young, vibrant and has the world at its fingertips.

But what comes next for home automation in the Middle East?

It's easy for a region to be identified by one landmark city, but what about its neighbours – Oman, Qatar or even Egypt?

There are parallels to be drawn between Dubai and the 19th century gold mining villages in the western world. In the old days, wherever gold was found people would assuredly congregate, setting up townships.

It took true pioneers to set out and look for the next big gold deposit.

This is not to take anything away from the work of installers in Dubai, without whom the city would not be known as a world leader in home automation innovation. But it would be foolish to ignore the work of pioneers in other cities who could be close to striking it rich.

Besides, with the governments of the GCC countries injecting more than US\$1 trillion a year into infrastructure development, these areas are ready to take off.

“One of the most prominent sectors in the region is the residential market,”

Crestron Middle East regional director Vincent Philippo says.

“Six years ago, investors couldn't have expected to see home automation in residential developments.

“Now, as property of any kind tends to sell out within hours or days of going on the market, the increased competition in the region has led to a rising trend in ‘smart home’ technology – or to use our language, home automation.”

Crestron currently has 11 employees in Dubai Internet City, taking care of sales support, technical support, training and order handling. The company has also opened a



satellite office in Saudi Arabia to keep up with the growing business in the Kingdom.

“Developers have become savvier in terms of what type of technology they use. In the past, several separate systems might have been incorporated into one development, restricting functionality and creating unattractive ‘wall acne,’” Vincent says.

“Developers now realise they have to use high-end technology to succeed – a full and effective solution instead of desperate, random products.”

In terms of home automation products in the region, controlled lighting and distributed AV are the most popular, Vincent says.

Crestron’s new Adagio home entertainment server range, which offers a choice of cost-effective audio distribution and media room systems is also popular (see page 36).

“The real challenge the industry is facing is getting to the developer early enough so that a budget can be allocated. Being a relatively new concept, the educational process for architects, developers and designers is important but will be difficult.

“Over the next five to 10 years, as the market continues to mature, customers’ expectations will change. This will be crucial to the success of our industry, as home

With home automation in Dubai going from strength to strength, how can installers from neighbouring countries benefit?

automation will cease to be treated as an ‘extra’ but more as a standard.

“The home automation market is relatively steady throughout the region thanks to some early adopters, who tried and tested some very primitive systems – primarily distributed AV, which has introduced the concept to the market.

“More recently, in the past year the savvier developers have realised that there is more to home automation than distributed AV.”

BEYOND DUBAI

“The connected home industry varies from country to country depending on the level of



“Developers now realise they have to use high-end technology to succeed – a full and effective solution instead of desperate, random products,” Vincent Philipppo says.

new development in the region,” Vincent says.

“The UAE, as mentioned, is thriving with a buoyant property market. Other parts of the Middle East have seen a bigger outlay in terms of commercial installations – educational establishments, boardrooms and hotels.”

In Qatar, the American School of Doha, founded in 1997, has been dramatically upgraded to welcome more than 1,300 students to the middle and high school.

to supply projection and sound systems to 77 classrooms in the new building, as well as six AV-equipped laboratories.

It separately won the contract to supply the technology fit-out for the new theatre, in which three separate sound systems, as well as AV technology, ensured a truly multi-purpose venue for the school.

Techno Q installed a comprehensive Crestron control system, based on the Pro-2

The job included installing 100 two-way wireless touch screens in the ballroom, meeting rooms, restaurants, presidential suites, royal suite, and the spa and health club.

Whether any region outside of Dubai will ever rival or surpass the extravagance there is up for debate.

For example, Hircon International, a joint venture between the Hiranandani group and ETA Star properties, has started construction on 23 Marina, the 90-storey marvel at Dubai Marina.

On completion, 23 Marina will be one of the world’s tallest residential buildings.

Hircon International has awarded a contract of more than AED 500 million (more than US\$136 million) to Dubai Civil Engineering to build the iconic tower, which will give residents a choice of two and three-bedroom apartments and four-bedroom duplexes designed for an elite and luxurious lifestyle.

The development will offer its residents a controlled, wireless lighting option from Crestron. And each of the apartments will be wired for distributed AV, enabling residents to take the option of a Crestron system if they wish.

Duplexes will have the system provided as standard. ■



“Over the next five to 10 years, as the market continues to mature, customers’ expectations will change, which will be crucial to the success of our industry as home automation will cease to be treated as an ‘extra’ but more as a standard,” Crestron Middle East regional director Vincent Philipppo says.

The new facility includes a library, dining hall, two computer labs, two presentation rooms, eight science labs, six projects labs, a fitness centre, an indoor 25m pool and a 600-seat theatre.

Techno Q, a leading Qatari systems integrator, won the contract to supply the entire AV solution and the lighting system for the multi-purpose theatre.

The scope was to supply an address and a master antenna TV system for the whole building. In addition, Techno Q was contracted

central control unit. Two wired TPS touch screens were employed – one on the lectern and one in the control room. There was also a third, wireless, device for roaming presenters.

“In Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Egypt we almost double our sales figures every year, and in Bahrain and Jordan we can see double-digit growth per annum,” Vincent says.

In Egypt, for example, a Crestron control system has been used at the Four Seasons Hotel at the San Stefano complex in Alexandria.

c o n t a c t s
> Crestron
www.crestron.com