



Custom Builder Finds Niche in Home Automation Market

Background

In today's market, home builders are looking for ways to distinguish their services from their competitors, putting their personal stamp on their developments to provide added value that differentiates their homes, making them more appealing and as a result, sell quicker.

For Houston-based builders, Frankel Building Group, staying competitive in today's market is necessary.

"We are constantly looking for ways to build a better home and set ourselves apart from our competitors," said Scott Frankel, Vice President of Operations and Construction at Frankel Building Group.

With more than twenty years in business, the family run, full service, custom home firm builds homes in the finest neighborhoods in Houston and specializes in sustainable construction.

When the opportunity to build 58 homes in ParkGate Reserve came along, Frankel decided to offer home amenities once considered luxuries as their new standard to attract potential clients and challenge the Woodlands market where they had no previous experience. ParkGate Reserve, a 50-acre wooded area converted into a residential development, features homes ranging in price from \$700K to \$1.2 million. To create a modern, "connected" home, Frankel decided to install an automation system in each home.

Frankel and Houston-based Systems Integrator, Premier Technology Group discussed a package for ParkGate Reserve that included lighting, HVAC and security automation. Pre-wiring throughout the house offers buyers the opportunity to upgrade the standard system based on their lifestyle and needs. Crestron was then brought in to help blend the needs

Together, the team designs technology packages that makes sense for each home and meet the builder's specific financial goals. The program puts Crestron technology and

infrastructure into homes to leverage the power and value that Crestron technology brings to a builder's efforts to sell their homes.

"Using Crestron distinguishes our homes from competitors," noted Frankel. "Building smart homes as a standard is a fairly radical concept. We have not seen anyone else do this."

"With the plethora of automation technology available to the consumer, we felt that the best solution was a Crestron solution," said Eric Herleth, Premier Technology Group Owner. "Crestron offers a customizable solution that allows builders to promote their business with out- of -the-box graphics, and other manufacturers do not offer that flexibility."

How it Started

After Frankel Building Group received questions from homeowners asking why it cost so much to pre-wire for the future, the firm decided to look into installing an expandable home automation solution that did not rely on wire.

Premier Technology Group Owner, Eric Herleth provided Frankel Building Group with recommendations for a control system that was highly intuitive, could be installed efficiently, and had great brand equity.

Crestron technology was top of the list for the lighting demands of the project since Crestron offered RF technology. Crestron Extended Range RF wireless technology affords robust wireless

communications over an impressive distance of approximately 100 to 200 feet indoors and up to 1000 feet outdoors. The RF Technology really excited the Frankel brothers. Expansion would no longer be limited by wire.

"When we learned of Crestron RF technology, we started putting Crestron in every house," added Frankel.

" We chose Crestron because people recognize the company and know its reputation. Crestron has a proven track record of reliability."

Scott Frankel, Vice President of Operations and Construction, Frankel Building Group

Frankel Building Group evolved into a full-time design and building firm based on the need to plan the home out from start to finish. The game plan for the intelligent home started in the beginning of the building process instead of at the end which typically occurred due to buyers making those home decisions once they are moved in.

For Frankel Building Group and Premier Technology Group, the challenges included figuring out how much more the market would allow them to spend on each home, tweaking the product offering, and educating the sales staff.





Utilizing the Mobile Pro® G application, homeowners can control their automation system utilizing the virtual Crestron touch screen on the Apple® iPad. Coined “Total Home Control,” the touch screen can control all of the home amenities including the gate, garage, lighting, HVAC, and pool. The iPad is stored in an in-wall docking station for convenience.

“In the planning, we asked ourselves questions like ‘What was the system going to control? How would it operate? How hard would it be to teach the homeowners? Could the maid, kids or grandparents operate it?’” said Frankel.

“In working with the builder channel, integrators do not have the opportunity to meet the buyers until the homes are sold which means we have to design a system that would provide the opportunity for complete expansion with a pricing structure that would accommodate most second and third time home buyers,” added Herleth.

Once the budget and objectives were confirmed, the installation was seamless.

The Solution

“We chose Crestron because people recognize the company and know its reputation,” said Frankel. “Our clients have friends with Crestron solutions and they never had an issue with the system. Crestron has a proven track record of reliability.”

The DIN-AP2 is a 2-Series control processor designed for small to medium-sized lighting and automation applications. The DIN-AP2 is the backbone behind every controllable feature

within a home, and works seamlessly with the entire line of Crestron lighting dimmers and shade controls, keypads, touch screens, thermostats and wireless gateways.

The Frankel Building Group package ties it in with their HVAC, security system, and three Crestron switches to control lighting at the front of the house and can be expanded.

Utilizing the Mobile Pro® G application with customization provided by Premier Technology Group, homeowners can control their house utilizing the virtual Crestron touch screen on the Apple® iPad. Coined “Total Home Control,” the touch screen can control all of the home amenities including the gate, garage, lighting, HVAC, fountains and pool. The iPad is stored in an in-wall docking station for convenience.

“Everything else can be added ala carte,” said Frankel.

The add-ons are handled by an integrator like Premier Technology Group, who works closely with homeowners to decide what features best fit their needs.

Crestron lighting provides comfort and dependability at all times. The exterior lighting automatically turns on in the dark so security is never compromised.

The home features wireless and wired connectivity. Crestron DigitalMedia 8G™ is prewired to select wall locations to distribute all analog and uncompressed HD digital content should the client want to upgrade. Standard CAT5 wire is also installed to give clients another option.

DigitalMedia is the solution for the digital age, creating a future-proof infrastructure.

“There is a real demand for digital infrastructure to future proof the home,” added Lien.

Benefits

Premier Technology Group will stand by the product, long after the house is built and owners are moved in.

“We will install the system and guarantee reliable operation,” noted Herleth. “Any support or maintenance required will be happily provided.”

The solution is designed to send Premier Technology Group alerts if security is breached and provide analytics and data so troubleshooting can be conducted remotely.

Every Frankel home is LEED certified and the Crestron lighting control solution helps reduce energy consumption significantly. Clients have the ability to check on the status of their HVAC in real-time to anticipate the amount of their utility bill.

Conclusion

For Premier Technology Group, business is booming. In addition to the ParkGate Reserve standard packages, the company is receiving additional upgrade projects in the same community.

“Fifty percent of the clients are upgrading their Crestron solution, adding on home networking, audio and video integration,” said Herleth.

The benefits for Frankel Building Group include staying relevant in a competitive market, satisfying customers’ needs and creating an entirely new standard in home technology.

Crestron is installed in more than 10 homes built by Frankel Building Group. Twenty more homes are slated to include Crestron in the next twelve months, and an entire neighborhood within the next three years.



Automating the Home: Tips for Home Buyers

- Ask yourself what you would like to see in the home to meet your lifestyle.
- Plan for the system you hope to own one day, not just what you can afford today. Choose a system today that acts as a foundation for other things that you may wish to incorporate in the future.
- Work with an integrator to develop your budget.
- Provide the builder with clear objectives.
- Choose a system with a long and successful track record. You are choosing something that will be a part of your day-to-day life, so you want a system and a company that will be around long into the future.
- Infrastructure is key. Make sure that your builder or installer is installing the correct wiring necessary for audio/video distribution, automation, energy management and computer networks. Adding infrastructure later increases costs exponentially.
- Familiarize yourself with the system’s features and educate those who may also be using it.