



WHY BATHROOM TECHNOLOGY IS A **SMART CHOICE FOR HOUSEBUILDERS**

A TRENDS INSIGHT

DESIGN
MEETS
FUNCTION



CONTENTS

A NEW ERA FOR HOME TECHNOLOGY IN NEW BUILD PROPERTIES	4
WHY TECHNOLOGY IS THE SMART CHOICE FOR HOUSEBUILDERS & DEVELOPERS BY GRANT BATES	7
THE BATHROOM OPPORTUNITY	16
EXPLORING HOUSEBUILDER ATTITUDES	20
SOLUTIONS FOR BATHROOM TECHNOLOGY	22
DRAWING CONCLUSIONS	24
DRIVING INNOVATION IN TECHNOLOGY	26

A NEW ERA FOR HOME TECHNOLOGY IN NEW BUILD PROPERTIES

The rise of technology in the home over the last few years has been nothing short of extraordinary. Today's homebuyers have lived through some of the biggest technological changes since the Industrial Revolution, embracing the consolidation of electrical appliances and gadgets into fewer, smaller, connected devices. Devices that were viewed as aspirational just a few years ago are now commonplace in the home - from app-enabled heating controls and smart doorbells, to voice-activated light bulbs and Bluetooth-enabled white goods. Most of these can be controlled centrally through a hub or smart phone.

Most importantly for housebuilders, home buyers are thinking ahead when it comes to technology in their property. In fact, UK homeowners are well and truly sold on the value that home automation adds, not only to everyday life, but also to the 'saleability' of their home. One recent study shows that spending an average of £179 on making your home 'smart' can add up to £16,000 to its value¹.

Depending on the devices installed, smart technology and home automation can improve eco-credentials of a new build home, boost security and increase convenience for users - all valuable selling points that help to sell a modern home quicker, at a higher price. Knowing that buyers are switched on to the long-term sales potential, this presents another opportunity for housebuilders.

Tapping into this potential is nothing new for developers, of course. New build homebuyers would be familiar with being able to customise options in the kitchen, but is it time for you, the housebuilder, to extend that scope? Where else can this revolution in smart technology drive benefits to the usability and 'saleability' of residential and new build properties?

This report will explore the ongoing opportunities for technological development in the new build home, identify the benefits for housebuilders and, in doing so, highlight the largely untapped potential of the bathroom when integrating technology into modern lives.

Bringing together expertise from real estate pioneers and technology innovators, together with real-world insights from homeowners and housebuilders, we are shining the spotlight on the next period of possibility for technology specification in new homes.

1. <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/uk/consumer-advice/technology/a568194/should-you-be-making-your-home-smart/>



MOTION-SENSE LIGHTING means that energy is only used when necessary as lights turn off when rooms are no longer in use.

SMART APPLIANCES allow for remote control, from simple 'on' and 'off' commands, to fridges with cameras inside which can be checked while away from home.

WI-FI SECURITY CAMERAS AND DOORBELLS can be linked to smart phones allowing for remote viewing and control, and giving complete peace of mind.

SMART LIGHT BULBS connect to the internet meaning that they are able to be turned on or off, remotely, using a smartphone.

SMART THERMOSTATS allow heating to be controlled whilst not at home, optimising energy usage.

SMART SPEAKERS can use in-built voice assistants to control smart home gadgets and listen to music around the whole house as one system.

SMART PLUGS connect to the internet meaning they can be controlled remotely via smartphone.

SMART DIFFUSERS control the scent of a home through a smartphone or to a schedule.



GRANT J. BATES

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WHY TECHNOLOGY IS THE SMART CHOICE FOR HOUSEBUILDERS & DEVELOPERS

By Grant J. Bates



The 'hotelisation' of the home has had a huge impact on the residential property industry over the last couple of years, influencing new builds in particular.

Now more than ever, housebuilders are looking to incorporate the latest technology into their properties in an effort to make them stand out against the competition. London has seen new properties built on a huge scale to cope with rising demand and housing shortages. International buyers are now firmly returning to the market post travel restrictions, and investment buyers are rearing their heads again following several turbulent years. Unsurprisingly, competition is rife.

The pandemic has led to an increase in time spent at home, increasing the appetite from buyers for a turnkey property that caters to their every whim. With a hybrid working model now commonplace and lockdowns leading to a surge in Zoom workouts, a house is now a gym, an office, a sanctuary and a home. Leaving home is a choice, not a necessity for occupants.



MEETING BUYER DEMAND

Property values are increasing across the country for a variety of economic reasons, fiscal stimulus, a low base rate and favourable demand. But the main practical consideration is buyers prioritising their day-to-day enjoyment of life. These life choices are driving buyer demand and their willingness to pay a 'convenience premium' is apparent. Developers are now starting to ensure that homes are finished to an exacting standard, using the latest technology to accommodate a new world with a focus on self-care, hygiene and flexible space. The practicality and convenience of the home are as important as the interior design.

One specific requirement from today's most discerning buyers is the desire for indulgent principal suites. Housebuilders will know that for a fantastically selfish floor dedicated to sleeping, bathing and dressing, the specifications are broad. Think remote-controlled lighting, motorised blinds, TVs hidden in ceilings and floors, coffee stations and minibars built into walk-in wardrobes, air purifiers, and beds that automatically adjust their firmness based on body type. All of this means that principal suites now rival a buyer's favourite hotel room for comfort and luxury. The bathroom, often open plan as part of the suite, must be a sanctuary. Stylishly ergonomic, it features roll-top baths, double basins, clever storage for clutter-free surfaces, steam showers and hygienic touch-free sanitary ware. A spa is the brief and technology is key to making this a reality.

In principal suites, many luxury housebuilders are moving towards voice control. Is it too much effort for their buyers to jump out of bed to switch the lights off? The answer is of course yes.

Technology has progressed considerably since the clap lights of the '70s and with the recent obsession with virtual assistant technology, developers are now looking to help occupants create a mood by setting light brightness and putting them on timers. I don't just mean timers to switch lights on and off at specific times throughout the day, I mean a comprehensive system that learns a person's routine. For example, if the buyer typically wakes up at 6.00am to make a coffee, the lights will turn on in the kitchen as they stumble downstairs, or into the walk-in closet. Often a key selling point, housebuilders are catering to the importance of self-care by introducing this technology in homes, ready for the buyer to take advantage of from day one.



THE CHANGING HOME

Housebuilders will know all too well that a property can sell on the principal suite, entertaining space and bathroom. These are the shots that take up the majority of a marketing brochure or the bulk of a short-form video, and with good reason. Buyers will spend most of their time in these spaces once moved in.

The kitchen and dining space need to look beautiful of course, but interior design is now only part of the sales package. Housing developers need to ensure that they tap into consumer trends that lead the agenda with discerning buyers. For example, we have seen a move towards hot taps by the stove, avoiding the need to move from the sink on the island to the hob. Smart taps are another trend; they react to a person's presence, so they can wash their hands, mid cook, without encasing taps in dough on their 'fakeaway' pizza night. Food waste disposal systems are now also considered standard too, meaning missing the bin collection is less of a catastrophe.

Luxuries of the past have become commonplace and are paving the way for innovative specifications as the market moves towards its next phase of indulgence. I have no doubt that by the time I draft my next insight, smart taps and sensor lighting will be as standard as the aforementioned food waste disposal systems and hot taps.



'Health is wealth' is a phrase we will see more and more of across social media and it's something that housebuilders should tap into as a result, especially as one's health has been prioritised over the course of the pandemic and beyond. Calories on menus might leave us shocked and disappointed that the almond croissant we had for breakfast contains more calories than we're recommended to consume in a week. However, if we thought eating at home would remove the shame, we would only be partly right. Smart fridges and pans now calculate calories before and as you cook. As this becomes a more common occurrence in the home, developers who cater to this trend will be future-proofing their developments and have the potential to be more successful than those who don't.

And technology extends beyond the kitchen too. Studies, 'shoffices' and other work from home spaces, are now akin to a professional YouTuber or influencers. Lighting, backdrops and high-performance web cams are all a necessary part of any work from home setup as remote meetings replace the commute to the board room. Homes with a plant room and the ability to hardwire super speed business broadband are ideal.



THE FUTURE IS NOW

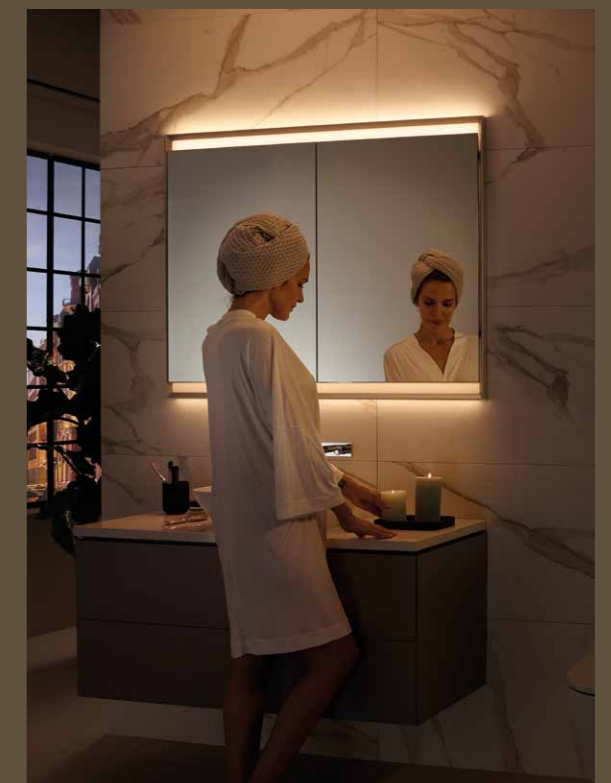
Which leads us to the bathroom where health, hygiene and cleanliness, have also grown in popularity, in line with technological advances.

There is an array of products on the market that developers can specify to meet a buyer's changing needs. For example, bathroom mirrors can deliver sympathetic LED lighting that perfectly frames the face for a morning skin routine, and of course, the perfect selfie. Discreet and powerful, an oxymoron perfectly exemplifying the stylishly ergonomic goal. When someone's skin routine is finished, infrared taps allow them to wash away any remnants of moisturiser without smudging their brassware.

Staying with lighting, and further evidence of design without sacrificing practicality, soft LED orientation lighting from bathroom manufacturer Geberit, ensures sleepyheads can find their way to the bathroom and back at night without waking too much. A gentle glow,

activated by a proximity sensor, is integrated into flush plates and toilets avoiding the need for bright lights which can disturb sleep. A perfect example of how developers can specify products that are not only well designed but also functional too.

Geberit's innovations also include a range of shower toilets, which are now commonplace in many developments across the world. Billed as the ultimate 'smart toilet' it taps into buyer demand by delivering next-level hygiene at the touch of a button. It leaves users clean and refreshed thanks to its 'washing with water' functionality, automatic dryers, lid sensors, temperature-controlled seats and built-in odour extraction. It creates an effortless and uncomplicated hygienic experience. It's another example of how housing developers can use technology to add value and help future-proof the home, either in anticipation of a growing family or multi-generational households.





RETURN ON INVESTMENT

With the development of social media and short form video - buyers can see more detail remotely without booking an in-person viewing. This means the questions asked pre-booking are often more specific. The more you have to sell and pitch, the more likely the physical viewing and the more likely a sale. More is more.

All of this means developers need to be both reactive and proactive. And while it is difficult to innovate, it's simple to facilitate because there is so much technology readily available. If it's not installed in a home, that is a choice based on return on investment. However, if it saves clients time and makes their life more convenient, it should become a staple. According to research from The Eco Experts, 65% of home buyers would spend more for a smart home, confirming that smart technology in the home is now easily justified in monetary terms with smart homes selling at market premiums and often ahead of the competition.

Developers should be focusing on the wow factors, the principal suites, entertaining spaces and bathrooms. If any buyer is choosing between two similar schemes, they will opt for the product that makes their everyday life better and smart technology does just that.

Home technology will continue to be a key consideration for real estate throughout the remainder of 2022 and beyond. With buyers more than happy to pay a premium for a ready-made turnkey home, according to Barclays Mortgages Digital Homes Report, buyers who can avoid the time spent sourcing and installing it themselves will pay a premium.

As a director at a successful estate agent, I have noticed that a handful of developers are leading the charge, and I fully expect them to be the most successful because the smartest homes will be the most desirable and achieve the highest values.

"I accept the return-on-investment argument, leaving developers pondering, is it worth it? In my mind and with the market potentially at a turning point, the answer is yes. A leading developer needs to do all they can to lure a buyer to its units. The evidence is clear. You cannot trust a view of the future from someone championing the past".

THE BATHROOM OPPORTUNITY

Clearly some areas of the home have advanced more rapidly than others when it comes to automation and smart integration.

Security, heating, lighting and entertainment have seen huge strides and significant ground has been made in individual rooms such as the kitchen, where household brands like Whirlpool, Samsung and Bosch are leading the charge.

If there is one room, however, that remains largely untapped when exploring the potential of smart appliances, it is the bathroom. Despite the increasingly important role that the bathroom plays in modern lives, technology in the bathroom has evolved at a slower pace. Different options within the specification are not typically offered in the same way that they are for kitchens. It is time for developers to widen that scope so they can actively take advantage of buyer demand.

Bathrooms are critical to selling a new build home, with attendees from various Geberit industry events supporting the trend that bathrooms are key to selling homes more quickly and for a higher return.

This is reinforced by Geberit research that highlights the changing role of the bathroom. Since the pandemic, home buyers are paying much more attention to features that will make spending time in their home even more enjoyable and luxurious.

The bathroom has become a place for sanctuary, a place to destress from the chaos of modern life and technology plays a part in achieving that, from acoustic optimisation to odour extraction. For housebuilders, there is a clear opportunity to improve saleability through bathroom design, specification and technological integration.



Bathrooms can offer a sensory retreat from our increasingly busy lives. But, more than that, they can help improve our quality of life. Nearly three quarters of us struggle to find time to relax according to Geberit research and the same poll shows that in the quest for some respite, the most popular place of refuge in the home is the bathroom. And technology within these spaces has a role to play. It's very much about 'calm' technology in this space. When it works well, people should remain unaware of it. It requires simplicity. The right amount of technology is the minimum needed to solve the problem – otherwise, technology can become overwhelming.

IDENTIFYING HOMEOWNER DEMAND

Technology has huge potential to drive benefits throughout the modern home, but housebuilders will understandably only invest in smart solutions if that potential is backed up by demand from their customers.

Geberit commissioned a survey of more than 1,200 homeowners about their attitudes to technology in the home. Does it really matter to them? Is it really that important when choosing a new home? And what benefits does it offer inside the home?

The results, showcased here, clearly indicate that more technology and smart options would be attractive to homeowners. Crucially, more than a third (35%) said they would be willing to pay more for a new home with technology.

OVER A THIRD OF PEOPLE (35%) SAID THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO PAY MORE FOR A NEW HOME WITH TECHNOLOGY.

FACILITATING BETTER LIVES

Geberit asked homeowners why they have technology in their home. Convenience, comfort, efficiency and personal wellbeing were highlighted as the most common answers, which highlights the role technology plays in helping to improve everyday lives.

HOMEOWNERS' TOP FOUR REASONS FOR HAVING TECHNOLOGY IN THE HOME:

51%

PLACED 'CONVENIENCE' AT THE TOP

39%

MARKED 'COMFORT'

35%

SCORED 'EFFICIENCY'

26%

CHOSE 'PERSONAL WELLBEING'

Other reasons offered include security (20%), hygiene (6%), future proofing the home (5%) and to show off to friends and family (3%).

Only 18% said they do not have any technology in the home – highlighting the growing interest for technology including smart devices, home automation and touchless technology.

THE BATHROOM POTENTIAL

Only 2% of homeowners in our survey have smart devices, home automation and/or touchless technology in the bathroom. This is compared with 70% in the living room, 34% in the kitchen and 29% in the home office.

FOUR IN TEN HOMEOWNERS IN OUR SURVEY BELIEVE THAT THERE COULD BE MORE TECHNOLOGY IN NEW HOMES AND THERE IS A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO MEET THAT DEMAND IN NEW ROOMS.



UNDERSTANDING DEMAND FOR BATHROOM TECHNOLOGIES

We asked which of the below bathroom technologies would you expect to find in a new build property. The results provide some interesting insights for developers, highlighting the most commonly expected technologies to make sure they are meeting demand.

21%

INFRA-RED TAPS

28%

TOUCH-FREE FLUSH PLATES

39%

ODOUR EXTRACTION

34%

ORIENTATION LIGHTING

22%

SHOWER TOILET

EXPLORING HOUSEBUILDER ATTITUDES

Industry commentators have identified the need for more technology and our survey of homeowners highlights the expectations, but what are the thoughts of those who are building new homes in the UK?

We also spoke to a number of individuals from a wide range of housebuilders, building between five and 12,000 properties per year, to better understand their attitudes to technology. And the results further highlight the appetite for continued growth in home technology solutions.

Whilst there is already some understanding of why technology is so important in modern homes, all respondents think that UK new build properties could feature more technology. The vast majority intend to enhance specifications in the coming years.

Key benefits of technology listed by our panel include differentiation from competitors, brand reputation and meeting buyer demand to sell the property more quickly.

In the bathroom specifically, various technologies are already being used to improve comfort and convenience for homebuyers – but again, there are plans to introduce more.



WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN A PROPERTY ONCE OCCUPIED BY A BUYER?

EFFICIENCY
HYGIENE SECURITY
COMFORT FUTURE PROOFING
 SHOW OFF TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY **CONVENIENCE**

BATHROOM TECHNOLOGY IS ALREADY EVIDENT – WITH PLANS FOR MORE

Most respondents currently feature bathroom technologies heavily in new build properties, with innovations such as infra-red taps, touch-free flush plates, odour extraction or shower toilets all common place. Many respondents also plan to install additional bathroom technologies in the future, recognising the value of technology in attracting buyers and selling new homes.



Joe Milkins, Key Account Manager (Client Developer) at Geberit believes 'Personalisation, especially including technology is becoming more important and it's key that manufacturers and developers collaborate early in the design process to meet this rising demand. This call for personalisation really is underpinned by the increasing requests for innovative technology in the home that helps to address wellness and hygiene.'



SOLUTIONS FOR BATHROOM TECHNOLOGY



SHOWER TOILETS:

Modern shower toilets like the Geberit AquaClean range combine maximum comfort and wellbeing with stylish design and advanced technology. A pulsating shower spray ensures thorough, gentle and water-saving cleaning for a 'fresh-out-of-the-shower' feeling, while Geberit's patented TurboFlush technology ensures a quiet and water-efficient flush, every time. An integrated odour extraction unit, built in orientation lighting and a warm air dryer add to the innovative technologies included.



TOUCHLESS TECHNOLOGY:

Even before the Coronavirus pandemic shone the spotlight on hygiene, Geberit had predicted the demand for tech-focused bathroom solutions. Infra-red and touchless technology in the bathroom can add real perceived value to the property, including infra-red sensors on taps and flush plates on WCs, removing touch-points for a premium, hygienic finish.



WALL-HUNG WCs:

Of course, technology doesn't have to mean connectivity and automation. New homes are getting smaller and creating attractive, practical and hygienic bathrooms in smaller spaces is an ongoing challenge for developers. Wall-hung toilets and sanitaryware provide a solution, creating the illusion of space by lifting products off the floor. Wall-hung systems offer greater design choices than ever before, and easy installation too thanks to the development of pre-wall frame systems, such as Geberit Duofix.



FUTURE-PROOF SHOWERS:

Showers already offer a wide range of innovative technologies including water conservation, voice-activated technology, Bluetooth compatibility and more. This consumer-facing technology is a fantastic way for housebuilders to add perceived value in the bathroom and, in doing so, improve the saleability of homes.



SMART MIRRORS:

Expect to see a continuation of mirror development, with futuristic designs that can display the news, show the weather or stream from a TV or streaming device. Geberit's Option Plus and Acanto mirror cabinets already have integrated USB ports for charging devices and augmented lighting solutions.



ODOUR EXTRACTION:

Bad odours in the bathroom are a universal problem. Air fresheners only mask odours temporarily and open windows just let in the cold air, but odour extraction technology offers a better solution. Geberit's DuoFresh module extracts air directly from the WC ceramic appliance and returns it to the room only once it has been purified. It can be easily installed into any Geberit Sigma cistern, and is compatible with most Sigma flush plates.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Of course, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to installing technology in new homes.

The evidence in this document suggests that there is an appetite from homeowners for more smart technologies in the home, together with demonstrable benefits for housebuilders. However, let's not forget that developers have to consider a myriad of factors.

Using technology to increase the specification of a new home - whether as part of an optionalisation strategy or included as standard - can pose challenges and must be weighed up against any number of factors including margin, sale price, location, Building Regulations and fire safety.

Any technological installation comes with additional considerations and there will inevitably be some innovations. Electric vehicle charging, for example, driven by regulatory demand, should arguably be considered before gadgets that support convenience and efficiency in the home.

However, bathroom technologies are relatively fuss-free solutions and come with huge perceived value in comparison to physical cost. Homeowners are open to them and, in many cases, expect them. By being open to changing attitudes and considering the long-term return on investment of such technologies, developers can tap into those benefits to help sell homes quicker and for a higher return.



DRIVING INNOVATION IN TECHNOLOGY

The innovation of Geberit's bathroom solutions are driven by an all-encompassing commitment to research and development, focused on ten key areas:

- HYDRAULICS
- MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY
- HYGIENE
- SURFACE TECHNOLOGY
- ELECTRONICS
- SOUND INSULATION
- STATICS
- FIRE PROTECTION
- PROCESS ENGINEERING
- VIRTUAL ENGINEERING

Bringing together the combined expertise of the global organisation and state-of-the-art research facilities, this R&D strategy enables Geberit to drive continued progress in technological development.

Our pioneering solutions are designed for the modern home today and in the future, delivering tangible benefits for housebuilders and their customers.



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