Voice controls & Smart Home: optimizing product design

The headline above was the title of an online webinar that was organized and broadcast by Parks Associates on December 3rd, 2020. The webinar was produced in cooperation with the ULE Alliance. It was mainly targeted at the US/North American audience.

Parks Associates, a certified business founded by Tricia Parks, is an internationally recognized market research and consulting company specializing in emerging consumer technology products and services.

Parks Associates produces multiple events for industry executives throughout the year, some of them related to the Smart Home industry. These include:

- CONNECTIONS US - hosts over 500 industry executives each year.
- CONNECTIONS™ Europe - examines digital living issues specific to the European continent.
- CONNECTIONS™ Summit – staged at CES each year, this event reviews the year in digital product and services and looks ahead to the major consumer and industry trends.

The Parks Associates/ULE Alliance webinar in December 2020 attracted 250+ registrations, and over 80 people attended the live webinar. The event was moderated by Jennifer Kent, Senior Director at Parks Associates, and speakers included:

- Doug Bellenger – Head of DIY Smart Home, ADT
- Jean Claude Bennoun – Marketing & Sales Manager, Crow Electronics Engineering
- Bill Scheffler – VP Business Development, DSP Group
- Avi Barel – Business Development Director, ULE Alliance
Jennifer presented research findings about the smart home market situation in the USA, with emphasis on data related to the use of voice for control in the smart homes. Findings included:

- There are an average of 12 connected devices in a smart home
- 49% of broadband households own a smart speaker device (up from 3% in 2016)
- Use of voice control is expanding from Apple Siri, Google Assistant, Amazon Alexa and Samsung Bixby to companies such as SONOS, First Alert, LG and more. These organisations are adding built-in voice control capabilities to their products. Another group of companies, such as Vivint, iRobot and Roku are adding “works with” features.
- Over 25% of users control smart devices with voice, 17% control entertainment devices, 35% of security system owners use voice for controlling them.
- Users are seeking a “unified experience”

>1/3 of security system owners control system via voice

Panel speakers described their companies’ experiences and decision-making process in selecting the appropriate communication protocol for their products.

Avi Barel of the ULE Alliance made a short introduction to ULE Technology and the ULE Alliance. Emphasis was on the unique and superior qualities of the ULE standard.
Bill Scheffler presented DSP Group’s product portfolio, focusing on IoT and Voice technology related business experiences, the broad and diverse base of DSP Group’s partners and the wide variety of products offered by their US based customers such as ADT, Network Thermostat and Ooma, in addition to leading customers in Europe and the rest of the world.

Jean Claude Bennoun explained that, early on, Crow realised the growing impact of IoT and smart home on its traditional business – wired and wireless sensor systems for the security industry. Crow needed to add a new, standardized wireless technology in order to support expanding functionality requirements. ULE Technology was selected based on its performance characteristics. According to Jean Claude, ULE’s voice capability is being used in various innovative ways, in addition to a large portfolio of security and safety sensors.

Some example applications were:

- Two-way voice verification - this brings an additional functionality to the standard security sensors and video images and is applicable to both consumer and professional security systems.
- Assisted living - telecare products to keep elderly people connected and create alerts in times of need.
- In the safety domain – broadcasting pre-recorded messages in case of an emergency: fire, flooding, etc.

When ADT started planning its DIY security system, it had to find solutions to series of challenges in order to eliminate the pain points of DIY security systems, principally, how to make the product intuitive and easy to use by customers. Voice support was a key element in the decision process, in addition to long battery life and long range – the ability to cover an entire house. The ability to use high quality, guaranteed voice communication in emergency situations, like glass break, flooding, smoke detection and more, wer the key considerations. All things considered, selecting ULE was a natural step for ADT.

The lively and informative panel discussion was followed by series of questions from the audience.

As stated above, this first webinar was targeted mainly at the North American market and audience. The second part of the webinar, targeted at the European audiences, was held in April 2021 and will be reviewed in the next edition of DECT Today magazine.