

# ELECTRONIC HOUSE

## Is Wireless the Way to Go? Yes and No

**Untethered technology may be the “wave of the future,” but it can drive up costs and there's good reason to still be a fan of hardwiring.**

Sep. 11, 2009 — by [Lisa Montgomery](#)

Ten years ago, the big talk in the home electronics industry was structured wiring. The prepackaged bundle of wire offered us a quick and easy way to get our homes prewired for all kinds of fabulous systems. A novel idea at the time, prewiring was preached as being the best thing since sliced bread.

Fast forward to 2009: We still hear a lot about wire—what with HDMI and fiber hype—but sadly, the frenzy over structured wiring packages has fizzled. The companies that pioneered the concept, like [OnQ](#), are still alive and kicking, and many installation firms still swear by prewire, but wireless is what it's all about today.

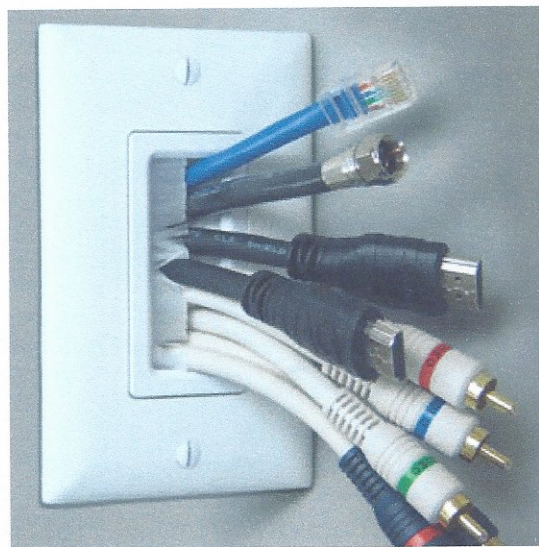
The ability for commands to travel over the air from home control touchpanels to light switches and thermostats is awesome, I get that. I also get that wireless solutions are a boon to owners of existing homes. What I struggle with is manufacturers' claims that wireless systems are more affordable than hardwired systems.

I called a few of my custom electronics pro friends to find out if wireless is truly as affordable as they say. Let me preface the following by saying that all of the installers I spoke with commend wireless. “It's the only solution we recommend for retrofit projects,” says David Randolph, vice president of engineering at [Electronics Design Group \(EDG\)](#) in Piscataway, N.J.

It's a completely different story when it comes to new homes, however. “You'll typically pay 30 percent more for a wireless system than a hardwired system for a new home,” says Randolph. The biggest part of that expense will go toward hardware. “A wireless light switch can cost \$100 more than a hardwired light switch,” says Rob Dzedzy, president of [Media Rooms Inc.](#) in West Chester, Pa.

He adds that the labor involved in setting up a wireless system can sometimes be surprisingly complicated, which can also drive up the cost.

Randolph concurs: “Everybody knows that wireless is subject to drop-outs, no matter how good the system is. To ensure strong signal transmission, we might have to add more repeaters than we had planned for or adjust the locations of equipment several times.”



In a new home you may pay 30% more for a wireless system than a hardwired one.

No matter what type of new, incredible technologies comes down the pike, I'll always have a soft spot for prewire. It's a proven winner, both in terms of performance and price. As always, be sure to consult with a qualified custom electronics professional to determine which option—hardwired or wireless—is best for your home.

**Prewire Your Home for These Amenities:**

**Whole-house music.** Pull wire to every possible speaker, keypad and volume control location.

**Video distribution.** Have wiring accessible wherever you plan to put a TV.

**Equipment racks.** Think about where you'll store your audio and video components, and make sure you can get wire there.

**Home theater.** Video projectors, subwoofers and other beefy equipment will need to be connected to your audio and video components.

**Lighting control.** Every dimmer switch and control keypad will need to be wired.

**High-speed computer networking.** Install Ethernet jacks in several rooms, not just the den.

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