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April 2012
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Savant Fills Lighting 'Missing Piece' with LiteTouch

Apple-based manufacturer no longer 'last major control player without its own lighting control,' thanks to its acquisition of the Nortek brand. BY JULIE JACOBSON

SAVANT SYSTEMS, best known for its high-end Apple-based home automation systems, recently acquired LiteTouch, maker of lighting control solutions for residential and commercial venues.

Savant bought LiteTouch from Nortek Inc., which had acquired the lighting company in 2007 and blended it into Panamax, maker of power management solutions.

"We were the last major control player without its own lighting control," says Savant general manager Jim Carroll.

Savant already offers its own automation systems (naturally) as well as its own audio/video distribution and control products. Lighting control, he says, "is the last big missing piece."

And what better way to enter the field than with the acquisition of a 30-year-old company that, Carroll says, created the first solid-state lighting control system? "As a lighting control company, it has a very strong programming platform that's easy to configure, which really attracted us to them."

Carroll says Savant wasn't just surveying LiteTouch's lighting-control products, but its entire portfolio including designer keypads, sensors and load control for energy management.

"We pick up this whole family of keypads, which aesthetically is a tremendous asset," Carroll notes. "There are a lot of jobs we do that don't have lighting control, but that still need keypads."

Beyond products, though, LiteTouch reaches channels that Savant does not, including electrical contractors and lighting specifiers.



Savant has rounded out its control portfolio with the recent purchase of lighting control company LiteTouch, whose products will eventually migrate to Savant re-branding.

"The channels line up very well," he says.

Savant already integrates with several lighting control systems — including LiteTouch, Lutron, Powerline Control Systems (PCS), Rako (Europe) and Vantage Controls, a Legrand company — enjoying a particularly cozy relationship with Lutron, the overwhelming leader in the category with a 38 percent market share among home systems integrators.

Carroll says Savant will continue its aggressive support of these and other vendors. The

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HOME CONTROL TWEETS OF THE MONTH

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company puts considerable effort into the integration with third-party subsystems, allowing integrators to basically push a button to migrate programming into the Savant platform, according to Carroll.

Savant, as well as its dealers, appreciates the variety of subsystems in the partner program and the Osterville, Mass.-based company has no plans to pull back its development in lighting-control integration, Carroll says.

The sentiment echoes that of other established home-control brands, many of which have built their own high-end lighting-control businesses organically: AMX and Crestron have offered their own lighting systems for several years, with great success. Last year, mainstream provider Control4 began shipping its hardwired solution (which was first revealed in 2008).

Each of these companies, like LiteTouch, offers hardwired (“panelized” or “distributed”) lighting controls, as well as proprietary wireless systems and hybrid solutions.

Likewise, the big lighting-control firms, including Lutron, Vantage, and Powerline Control Systems (PCS), have built their own home-control ecosystems. LiteTouch itself has tread more gently into the home-control space, but does offer a suite of energy management and monitoring products.

Analyzing the Brands

Savant is an up-and-comer in high-end home control — often considered to be the first viable competitor to long-time leaders AMX and Crestron, as well as Vantage and Nortek-owned Elan Home Systems.

Founded in 2005, Savant began shipping products in 2008.

In 2011, 11 percent of residential integrators surveyed by *CE Pro* said they had used Savant within the past two years, up from 5 percent in 2010 and 2 percent in 2009.

In 2011, 3 percent of CE pros said Savant was their most-used home automation brand, up from zero in previous years.

The numbers are even rosier for Savant among higher-end integrators, which make up the bulk of *CE Pro 100* dealers. Among that group that are will-

ing to reveal their brand usage, 24 percent said they used Savant in 2011, the No. 3 brand behind Crestron (64 percent) and Control4 (55 percent).

The previous year, only 10 percent of *CE Pro 100* dealers noted using Savant, then the No. 5 brand. As a caveat, the survey asks integrators to name their top three brands in each product category; thus, there is a high likelihood more integrators are using the brand than the survey indicates.

CE Pro research also indicates that many integrators have LiteTouch in their arsenal. Between 2005 and 2011, 6 percent to 8 percent of dealers surveyed said they had used LiteTouch products in the last two years.

What LiteTouch Brings to the Table

“Savant’s acquisition of LiteTouch creates unique opportunities for industry innovation, design collaboration and product development,” says Angie Larson, VP of sales and marketing for LiteTouch.

Carroll is very high on LiteTouch’s technology and innovation, and its strong engineering staff. He appreciates LiteTouch’s elegant keypad selection, of which there is nothing equivalent in the Savant line. He also sees LiteTouch’s sensors and other accessories giving Savant a quick path to additional home automation control points.

As for the integration of LiteTouch and Savant, Carroll says that LiteTouch dealers will be Savant dealers starting today, and that the company has called all of the related parties — distribution partners, reps, specifiers, etc.

“We will continue to support all of our partners, he says. “We enjoy a great relationship with them, and we hope to continue that.”

Carroll adds that LiteTouch employees will be kept in place at its Salt Lake City headquarters, though the branding itself will begin to transition.

“It will probably be something like ‘Savant Smart Lighting Control powered by LiteTouch,’” he says of the newly acquired offerings. “Obviously we’ll want to move away from the LiteTouch brand, but it’s still a very valuable brand [during the transitional phase].” ■

TazTag Claims 1st Droid Phone with NFC, ZigBee

SOME SAY HOME automation will not need dedicated protocols such as Z-Wave and ZigBee, because smartphone makers will never embed those technologies in their mobile devices.

They’re wrong. French-based TazTag introduced what appears to be the first ZigBee-enabled mobile phone at the recent GSMA Mobile World Congress 2012 in Barcelona.

The TPH-ONE, which also includes Near Field Communication (NFC), is touted as an ideal controller for home automation and smart energy applications as well as RF4CE, the ZigBee-based A/V control protocol that we’re starting to see in some consumer electronics devices and set-top boxes.



The TPH-ONE Android phone from TazTag most likely will mimic the commercial-oriented TazPad tablet with NFC and ZigBee, introduced last year.

Last year, TazTag introduced what looked to be another industry first: the TazPad Android tablet with NFC, ZigBee and biometrics. That product is primarily geared toward commercial markets. The new smart phone marks the company’s first foray into the consumer market.

Many home-control pundits suggest that ZigBee, Z-Wave and similar technologies will be supplanted by low-power IP (Wi-Fi) solutions. Perhaps TazTag will prove otherwise.

The TPH-ONE was slated to become available in March. —Julie Jacobson