ABB unveils intelligent voice-activated smart home system

Zurich, Switzerland, Sept. 06, 2015 – New free@home system controls 60 functions and enables combination of processes using 'if… then' logic.

ABB, a global leader in power and automation, unveiled the world's most advanced voice activated smart home automation system at the IFA consumer electronics show in Berlin, Germany. This latest innovation allows consumers to use voice commands to control more than 60 home automation functions for the full range of applications in a typical residential smart home environment including lighting, heating, blind control and door communication.

ABB launched free@home last year to make it easier for installers to offer home automation, bringing the advantages enabled by the Internet of Things, Services and People into people's homes. The system makes it simple – via smart device or a personal computer – to manage multiple functions to create the home environment of consumers' choice. Now, by adding voice control, home automation becomes even simpler.

Axel Kaiser, Manager for ABB's Living Space Product Group, said: "Our aim is to make home automation easier than ever and free@home creates a new space in the market. We continue to add functionality and our latest voice activation provides even more comfort and convenience for users. Coming home after dark, you can just command: 'turn the hall lights on' and lights are activated, or as you leave your house you can call: 'switch all lights off' and it's done."

According to digital research service BI Intelligence, the market for smart homes devices was worth more than $61 billion in 2014 and is expected to grow to $490 billion by 2019, an annual growth rate of around 50 %.

Users can program the system to choose the names of rooms and areas. The system can be set so that users receive a confirmation that a command has been activated, so when you state: 'close the shutters in the living room', you would hear 'the living room blinds are all closed', etc. Additionally, users can ask the system questions about the status of the functions, such as: 'are the lights off in Thomas' bedroom?' and the system will provide an answer.

ABB has implemented a hybrid voice recognition solution which is a combination of grammar based speech recognition and a statistical speech model. Natural speech and 'commando based' input is possible, so the user can state either 'please can you switch the living room lights on' or 'living room – lights – on'. The dialog processor within the voice control system uses algorithms to recognize the user's intention and the context. The user does not need to be trained as the speech model adapts based on the words programmed into the free@home system (name of floors in the home, rooms and functions being controlled). The system gathers the data from the context, but also from a large voice library. Moreover, should the command not be complete enough, the system will ask the user for more information.

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An additional enhancement is a new 'Actions' menu, which enables intelligent combination of different processes, using 'if… then', logic. For example, if the room temperature exceeds 25 °C, the blinds could automatically close. And if the motion detector is triggered, the user will receive a notice via email or via push notification on their smartphone.

The home automation solution is sold under the Busch Jaeger brand in Germany, Holland and Austria and under the ABB brand in all other markets around the world.

As part of ABB's Next Level strategy the company is achieving growth through product innovations that unlock the potential for increased automation in the home through the Internet of Things, Services and People. The company aims to enhance the comfort, efficiency and safety of people's homes through the application of intelligent solutions.

ABB (www.abb.com) is a leader in power and automation technologies that enable utility, industry, and transport and infrastructure customers to improve their performance while lowering environmental impact. The ABB Group of companies operates in roughly 100 countries and employs about 140,000 people.

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