



“Experience the Difference”

BUILDING SUCCESS 101

Q: What are GFCIs, and why do I need them?

A: A ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) is an electrical outlet with a built-in circuit breaker to protect users from the risk of severe shock. The code requires one where there's a chance the outlet might be exposed to high moisture: outdoors; in basements, crawlspaces or garages; and in kitchens, baths and laundry rooms. The GFCI does not protect against circuit overloads and must still be on a circuit with a breaker.



Forward to Friend

Is Voice Control for You?

More and more home systems are adding voice control technology. Let's look at the pros and cons.

The star of this year's International Builder's Show was a smart lady by the name of Alexa. As you know, she's the personal digital assistant that lives inside Amazon's Echo smart speaker, and we seemed to bump into her around every corner.

Two years ago, manufacturers at the show--the largest annual exhibition of homebuilding-related products in the United States--were touting appliances and home systems with smartphone control, but that's old news now. These products and systems are moving strongly toward voice recognition.

Should you embrace this trend when building your new home, or is it better to wait? Most of the press we've seen about this technology gushes with optimism, but we believe it warrants a more critical approach.

On the plus side, we're big fans of any technology that solves a real problem or offers benefits such as convenience, security or energy savings. We especially like gadgets that make life less stressful, and some voice-activated products certainly fit the bill.

Take plumbing fixtures. You can command Delta's new voice-activated kitchen faucet to turn on or off while your hands are caked with cookie dough or carrying a heavy pot filled with water. Moen's digital shower will set the water to whatever temperature you say. Kohler even lets you tell the tub to fill to a precise depth and temperature, via a microphone embedded in a nearby mirror.

As for appliances, GE showed a new Kitchen Hub with a voice-activated assistant named Geneva (available in late 2018). The hub screen is built into an over-the-range microwave, useful for displaying recipes and playing music and TV shows. GE claims Geneva will have a conflict-free working relationship with Alexa or Google Assistant.

On the other hand, some of the technology at the show seemed like solutions looking for problems. At one booth, a company rep asked the refrigerator the status of the dishwasher and waited patiently for an answer. Why not just turn around and look?

These were just a few samples of the countless voice-activated products on display, which included everything from window shades to light fixtures to thermostats.

We expect to see more voice-activated products in the future, many of them building on technologies that already enjoy a market. For instance, Apple's Home Kit controls lights, shades, door locks and security devices with Siri, the voice-activated assistant built into the iPhone. The company's new Home Pod speaker has Siri inside, which means you can control those devices without touching your phone.

That begs a question. With digital assistants multiplying, what happens if you have one product with Siri and another with Alexa or someone else? Will they really get along? Even if you limit yourself to a single platform, it's not clear yet that every device on its list will work without glitches or without the need for programming, at least in the near term.

Finally, there's the question of updates. Sure, lots of us are reconciled to buying a new phone every few years, but we expect major appliances to last at least a decade, and that includes their tech features. Much of this voice recognition technology lacks that kind of track record.

The bottom line is that we want our clients to enjoy their new home, including any built-in tech amenities. That's why we advise working with your builder to ensure that the products you choose will fulfill that promise.

Warm Regards,

Todd

Todd Gaul
President and Owner
Designer Builders, Inc.
935 Dougherty Road
Aiken, SC 29803

(803) 642-8340 - Phone
email@designerbuilders.com



www.designerbuilders.com

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