

# Do Smart Electronics Improve Life?



## MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER AND CEO JERRY D. WILLIAMS

**ONE THING IS FOR CERTAIN; THERE ARE MORE** electronic devices available for our homes than ever before. The perplexing question is; do these devices improve our life or make it more frustrating? I am pretty sure one of my sons would always be on the side of improvement because he thinks he has to have the latest electronic gadget, while I am still trying to determine why anyone would want the device. He is not old enough to remember when the VCR blinked 12:00 all the time because resetting it or reprogramming was just too much trouble. That is assuming someone remembered how to program the VCR. One thing for certain is this ever-changing world of electricity and electronics has produced a lot of electronic devices for our homes and businesses.

There are some pretty neat electronic devices on the market that can do a lot of things, if installed properly. Just watch out for items that slowly add up to a higher electric bill.

Security systems, even with video monitoring, use very little electricity but if they require an internet connection, it could mean a computer, satellite dish and perhaps a wireless router must be powered on using electricity. Not a big energy user but each little item adds up.

A digital power strip that turns the power off to appliances (like your TV, computer and game consoles) when you don't normally use them will reduce the electric bill. These appliance normally consume a constant trickle of power, often referred to as phantom power drain. TV sets or game consoles in spare bedrooms can be plugged into a simple power strip and one switch can turn everything off when it is not in use.

Some of these electronic devices can help you reduce your electric bill, but some of them will only reduce your cash. Smart lighting systems will allow you to turn off lights using your phone or tablet. Some systems will let you close your garage door, set the alarm, turn off water and change the AC setting, all from a phone or tablet. It seems marketers assume

there are a lot of folks that like gadgets or just enjoy doing things remotely.

If you really want to reduce your electric bill, turn off the lights when you leave a room or when you leave the house. Turning the bedroom lights off from the living room may be cool, but the short trip across the house can help reduce the time needed at the gym. Once you have developed the habit, it becomes natural. Turn out the lights, turn off the AC, lock the doors and close the garage door was at one time a normal life lesson passed on by parents to their young. Yes, lighting, heat-



ing or cooling an empty house is a waste of money but the most cost effective way to deal with these systems is to develop a habit of turning it off before leaving.

Programmable thermostats are a great way to reduce your electric bill, if they are programmed properly. While visiting homes with high electric bills, I have not found a single programmable thermostat that was being used correctly. My conclusion is "life happens." Holidays happen, company comes over or someone gets too hot or someone gets cold and settings get changed. After a while, most folks can't remember how the program is supposed to work so all the programs get bypassed. In most homes the most efficient setting when

everyone is at work or school is “off”; not 80 in summer and 60 in winter. It would be nice to have the AC/Heat come on about 30 minutes before you get home, but can you remember how to enter the program? Turning the AC on when you get home may be a little inconvenient, but the inconvenience is not for long. Don’t forget the digital thermometer on the wall that controls your central unit will sample the temperature on that wall only. A separate thermometer located in the living area away from any heat source, such as a lamp, is the best way of regulating the temperature and thus setting the central AC/Heat thermostat. In my house, the kitchen bar behind my lounge chair is consistently two degrees cooler than the central unit thermostat.

The lightbulb may not sound like a sophisticated electrical device and you don’t need a phone or tablet to use it but the new version can lower your electric bill. Many of us have the lights on about 4 hours a day; one hour in the morning and about three hours at night, depending on the time of year. I can buy a six pack of Great Value brand LED lightbulbs that are equivalent to 60 watts, but use 8.5 watts for \$12.88. Six standard incandescent 60 watt bulbs are about 50 cents each. The standard incandescent bulbs will use about 144 kWh in 100 days. At 11 cents per kWh that comes to \$15.84. The six LED bulbs would only use 20 kWh in 100 days or about \$2.20. In only 100 days you will save \$13.64 which more than offset the additional \$8.88 you paid for the LED bulbs. At the end of one year you would have saved around \$50 on your electric bill for those six bulbs.

The answer changes if you assume those six bulbs are located in closets that are used only 10 minutes each day. At the end of one year the combined six LED bulbs in the closets would have saved only \$2.09. This means it would take over 4 years for you to recover the higher price paid for the LED bulbs used in closets.

One of the new technologies out there helping Lamar Electric Cooperative members is an App called SmartHub. This online tool can be used to monitor your electric energy consumption from anywhere at any time. You can even check your service status to determine if our Outage Management System knows your power is out. With one click, you can even report an outage. If you like paying bills online this app will help you pay your electric bill using your phone or tablet.

To learn more about our SmartHub app or online services, visit our web site at lamarelectric.coop or call our communications director at (903) 783-4949. We’re here to help.



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# Hack Attack

## KATIE MORRIS HERE—YOUR CO-OP COMMUNICATOR.

I am here to tell you about the dangers of hack attacks!

More and more of our members are getting smart devices that require a Wi-Fi connection. Remotely opening garage doors, turning on air conditioners and recording TV shows are just a few things our members are doing through Wi-Fi.

Remotely turning on your lights may sound like an interesting luxury, but have you considered the ramifications of a hack attack? An experienced hacker could view your daily habits through your Wi-Fi security cameras and look in on your spouse, children or grandchildren. They could discover days when you are not home and let themselves in through remote-access door locks. Hackers also can monitor your online habits, bypass your passwords and log in to your private accounts. YIKES! That's a scary thought. There are a few things you can do to protect yourself from hack attacks, but no effort is 100 percent guaranteed to protect against hackers.

The first thing you should do is secure your Wi-Fi. If it does not require a password, you should change the setting and implement one immediately. If you aren't sure how to do this, do a quick internet search or call your internet service provider and ask how to create a Wi-Fi password.

If you don't have a password-protected Wi-Fi connection, your neighbors or any Average Joe driving by could hop on your Wi-Fi and do all kinds of damage. When Lamar Electric first installed an open Wi-Fi guest network (separate from our operations network) for our members to use in our office we did not password protect it for convenience to our members. Our IT guy was on the ball and realized quickly that our friendly neighbors and folks sitting in their cars in surrounding parking lots were connecting to our Wi-Fi. We secured the network quickly and haven't had a problem like that since.

Second, you should keep your computer up to date. I know, I know: These "required" updates take forever, but they really do help. Not only do they provide updates to bugs and issues discovered over time; they also repair security and hacking vulnerabilities that a hacker could use to get into your system and wreak havoc.

Third, install antivirus software on your computer. Doing this is basically installing an immune system for your computer to protect against viruses. Just like your body's immune system, it won't catch every infection or hack, but it will greatly improve your defenses.

Fourth, use common sense. The prince of Nigeria doesn't need any help from you in aiding his efforts to smuggle money out of his country. You didn't magically win that con-



BY KATIE MORRIS

test you never entered, and you didn't apply for that job you are being offered.

DO NOT give out your bank account information willy-nilly. DO NOT click on links or open email attachments that look the slightest bit suspicious, or even unfamiliar. If it looks far-fetched or too good to be true, it probably is!

Also, beware of "Trojan horses." A Trojan is a type of virus that sneaks its way onto your computer through what may appear to be reputable means. An example would be an email from a bank or shipping service citing a problem with your transaction. By opening the attachment in the email, you can see a "bank statement" or "shipping details." Once you click on these links or attachments, they begin to download themselves to your computer, and the damage is done. A Trojan can overtake your email account, pretending to be you, sending emails to your friends and family who trust your email address. The Trojan will ask them to click links or download email attachments—and the virus spreads like wildfire.

Lastly, use a strong password. I'm not talking about your dog's name and your anniversary date. I can find that out by looking at your Facebook page! I'm talking about a sequence of letters, numbers, and characters that is difficult to guess. A password with more than eight letters and numbers that includes special characters (such as @, \$, \* or &) is typically a strong password. The more critical the information you are trying to protect, the stronger your password should be.

Don't forget about the security questions. If a hacker is unable to guess your password, they can try to guess the answers to your security questions. My personal suggestion would be to answer the security questions with a bogus answer that no one could guess, as if it is another password. What is your mother's maiden name? FI\$HYFOX27, that's what.

Frank Abagnale, Mr. *Catch Me If You Can* himself, suggests using a phrase as a password and replacing certain letters with characters and numbers. An example of this would be "Jack and Jill Ran Up The Hill" with the letters replaced with characters it would read "J@ck&Ji11R@nupThehi11." It will be easier to remember while still being very secure. This type of password does not contain any personal information about yourself and will be a tough password to crack.

Hackers are typically after one thing: data. They want your passwords, they want your files and they want your personal information. If a hacker learns enough about you, they could steal your identity. I don't say this to scare you, only to aid you in protecting yourself and your home. Smart devices are fun to use, but only if you know the risks when connecting your life to Wi-Fi and take necessary precautions.



## RECIPE OF THE MONTH



# Labor Day Appliance Sales

**YOU CAN SAVE A BUNDLE ON MAJOR APPLIANCES DURING LABOR DAY AND END-OF-SUMMER SALES** as dealers make room for next year's models of refrigerators, dishwashers, stoves, and washers and dryers.

Not ready to buy? Mark your calendar for upcoming sales year-round, especially at these times:

- ▶ New Year's Day and Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in January. Also look for big sales on Presidents Day in February.
- ▶ In late spring, stores advertise sales on appliances such as microwaves and coffee makers that make good gifts for graduates who soon will be furnishing dorm rooms or new apartments.
- ▶ Look for sales on major appliances around Mother's Day and Memorial Day in May, and on tools and electronics in mid-June, when children are buying gifts for Father's Day.
- ▶ Columbus Day, the second Monday of October.
- ▶ Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving. Look for package deals on appliances; you'll save extra if you buy several from the same store at once.
- ▶ The week after Christmas. All of next year's new models will be fully in stock by then, so stores will put the current year's appliances on clearance.

For extra savings down the line, purchase efficient Energy Star-rated appliances that will save you money on your electric bill.

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## Italian Meatballs

- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 1 cup minced parsley
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs, gently whisked
- 5 ounces Romano cheese, shredded
- 5 ounces Parmesan cheese, shredded
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt

1. Mix all ingredients in a large mixing bowl until well combined. Roll into golf ball-sized meatballs and place on broiling pan.
2. Broil about 10 minutes, rotating to prevent burning, then drain on paper towels.
3. Once crisp, add meatballs to your favorite tomato sauce and simmer before serving.

## Power Tip

Setting your thermostat to a colder setting than normal when you turn on your air conditioner will not cool your home any faster and could result in excessive cooling and unnecessary expense.



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