

How to go high-tech on a low budget

Raise your home's IQ with these gadgets. By Victoria Brzezinski



Zuma offers sound and light in the form of downlights installed into your ceilings

The days of prohibitively expensive gadgetry are behind us. From video doorbells like Ring to voice assistants such as Amazon's Alexa and Google Home, smart home technology has become a ubiquitous fixture in houses across the UK. Here are six products to soup up your surroundings, without breaking the bank.

One of the most ingenious developments in home tech is **Zuma**, an all-in-one high-

fidelity audio and high-performance lighting system that slots into any room with existing downlights, using the lighting circuit and switches. The British start-up is led by the industrial designer Morten Warren, who is on a mission to “streamline the ceiling” and deliver immersive sound with his ultra-compact downlight fixtures. It has been designed with acoustic engineers including Trevor Wilson

(formerly of Naim audio) and Laurence Dickie, the creator of the Nautilus loudspeaker — “one of the finest examples of high-end audio engineering in history”, according to *What Hi-Fi?* magazine.

Each of Zuma's 9.5cm Lumisonic (sound and light) units costs £375 — you need between four and six for an average room. The clutterless system offers sound quality comparable with Sonos, Bose



and Bang & Olufsen but it bypasses the need for sound bars, subwoofers or ugly cables. The integrated low-energy LED can be dimmed and colour-tuned depending on your mood — or a circadian mode mimics the ebb and flow of natural sunlight. The whole wi-fi-connected system can be voice-controlled with an existing Alexa, via the Zuma mobile app or with Zuma's latest release, Smart Bezel Voice — a 1mm-thick Alexa microphone attached with a magnet, which removes the need for an external Alexa device in the room.

Installing a built-in audio-visual (AV) system is often expensive and complicated, requiring extensive cable work, head-end equipment and labour. You could expect to pay about £45,000 for kitting out a typical three-bedroom house using brands such as Lutron and Crestron, versus a little more than £10,000 with Zuma.

Over the next year, look out for a suite of additional functions to Zuma's Smart Bezel series, including carbon monoxide monitors, cameras, air purifiers and motion sensors. These can all be retrofitted onto existing units so there will be no extra installation required. It's a brilliant concept — get in touch with the company to test it out at a partner's showroom or in the roving Zuma van. zuma.ai

If you just want to dip your toe in the world of home tech, a smart plug is the ideal introduction. The consumer magazine *Which?*'s best buy is



You can control both lighting and sound from your phone via the Zuma app

the straightforward **TP-Link Tapo P100** (£8.99, very.co.uk); use it to turn your appliances on and off remotely, either using your mobile phone via the app (compatible with Android and iOS) or using voice commands (it is compatible with Alexa and Google Assistant). You can also set up timers and schedules for your devices, to simplify switching off hard-to-reach sockets, or to make your lights turn on and off when you're away to deter burglars. TP-Link's KP115 wi-fi plug (£21, shop.bt.com) is the more advanced model — it also monitors energy usage.

In these sweltering temperatures, a smart fan is a far more energy-efficient option than an air conditioner. **Duux's Whisper Flex smart fan** is a powerful, Quiet Mark-rated design with 26 settings controlled via an app or the remote control. An extender means it can easily be transformed between desk and pedestal size and it's also compatible with Google Home if you want voice control. A night mode means you won't be bothered by the LED display (£144, very.co.uk).

Installing a **Grohe Blue smart tap** (£1,220, savemoneycutcarbon.com) will minimise plastic waste and help you to keep an eye on water usage. The Bluetooth-enabled kitchen mixer tap produces filtered, chilled, still and/or sparkling water — and has natty temperature gauges and efficiency sensors that you can control via an app on your phone.

For dog owners, **Furbo** (£169, furbo.com) is a treat-dispensing camera that keeps an eye on your pooch while you're not at home. Compatible with Alexa, it allows you to see, talk to and toss treats to your furry friend. If your dog starts barking when you're out, you'll be sent an alert — you can tell your Alexa to play calming music or turn on the TV.

If you've got a baby on the way, consider splashing out on Happiest Baby's Beyoncé-approved **Snoo smart sleeper** (£1,145, harrods.com). Suitable for newborns up to six months, the internet-enabled bassinet is designed to take on some of the endless rocking and settling, aiding your little one's sleep with a combination of swaddling, white noise and gentle oscillation. An app also records your baby's sleep and nap time. One new mum who bought a Snoo for her second child, says: "Our first baby was so hard to get to sleep and needed so much rocking, so for us [Snoo] sounded like a good idea." Her tip? Scour Gumtree or eBay for a cheaper second-hand model. ■