Thread count: Ikea is stitching together a smarter home

Ikea is relaunching its smart home line in a move that will make its low-cost products work with other brands, with or without Ikea's own hub. Starting in January, the Swedish furniture giant will release more than 20 new Matter-over-Thread smart lights, sensors, and remotes with "more new product types and form factors to come," David Granath of Ikea of Sweden, tells *The Verge* in an exclusive interview.

Ikea is also rebooting its audio offerings as it seeks to fill the Sonos Symfonisk-shaped hole on its shelves. The first two models in the new line of inexpensive, easy-to-use Bluetooth speakers for the home are the $50 retro-style Nattbad and a speaker-slash-table-lamp, the Blomprakt, coming in October, with many more on the way.

These new products are part of the company's ongoing effort to make its smart home as simple and affordable for as many people as possible. "A couple of years ago, we made some strategic decisions about how to move on with the smart range and the speaker range and make an impact in an Ikea way for the many people," says Granath. He points to the company's learnings from working with Zigbee and Sonos over the last few years, as well as its involvement in founding and developing the new smart home standard, Matter. "We feel we've reached that point. There's a lot coming, but this is all the first step, getting things in place."

Last week, Ikea released an update, currently in beta, to its Dirigera smart home hub that turns the hub into a Matter Controller and activates its long-dormant Thread radio, making it a Thread border router. This means it can now connect to

and control any compatible Matter device, including those from other brands, alongside Ikea's new Matter line (which will eventually replace its existing Zigbee devices, says Granath). It's a major step toward a more open, plug-and-play smart home.

The Blomprakt is an LED table lamp featuring a Bluetooth speaker integrated into its top. It's part of Ikea's new focus on smart home and sound as it moves on from Zigbee and Sonos. Image: Ikea

Initially, Dirigera will only support Matter device types that Ikea currently offers — so, no robot vacuums, door locks, or fridges. However, Granath says that as they launch more smart home products, the hub will be updated to support more device types.

The Dirigera hub already functions as a Matter Bridge, enabling Zigbee-based Ikea devices to connect to larger Matter ecosystems like Apple Home and Amazon Alexa. With the update, it now supports Matter 1.4 and Thread 1.4, enabling energy monitoring and the ability to join an existing Thread network, among other features.

While the full rollout is expected later this year, the beta is live now through Ikea's Home Smart app, but some features will be limited, says Granath.

Matter unlocks interoperability, ease of use, and affordability for us

We don't have a lot of details on the over 20 new devices coming next year, but Granath confirmed that they are replacing existing functions. So, new smart bulbs, plugs, sensors, remotes, buttons, and air-quality devices, including temperature and humidity monitors. They will also come with a

new design. Although “not necessarily what’s been leaked,” says Granath, referring to images of the Bilresa Dual Button that appeared earlier this year.

He did confirm that some new product categories will arrive in January, with more to follow in April and beyond, including potentially Matter-over-Wi-Fi products. Pricing will be comparable to or lower than that of previous products, which start under $10. “Affordability remains a key priority for us.”

“The premium to make a product smart is not that high anymore, so you can expect new product types and form factors coming,” he says. “Matter unlocks interoperability, ease of use, and affordability for us. The standardization process means more companies are sharing the workload of developing for this.”

Despite the move away from Zigbee, Ikea is keeping Zigbee’s Touchlink functionality. This point-to-point protocol allows devices to be paired directly to each other and work together out of the box, without an app or hub – such as the bulb and remote bundles Ikea sells.

This means older Zigbee remotes can control the newer Thread bulbs and vice versa, retaining backward compatibility with its Tradfri line. “Touchlink and Matter will coexist in new products,” says Granath. “It’s still very important for Ikea – not everyone wants an app or hub.”

Interestingly, Ikea’s new Matter-over-Thread products will also work without the Ikea hub or app, as they can be set up directly in any compatible Matter smart home ecosystem, such as Apple Home, Amazon Alexa, Google Home, Samsung SmartThings, Home Assistant, and others.

It’s the fact of Matter

Native Matter compatibility in Ikea’s new products means you don’t have to use them with Home Smart app and Ikea’s hub.
Photo by Thomas Ricker / The Verge

Ikea’s move toward full adoption of Matter positions it to be a more open platform, which should help with its efforts to make the smart home easier and more affordable. It’s also a significant shift for the industry.

Granath says Ikea’s goal is for customers to get the best value from their products — it doesn’t matter whether that’s with Apple Home, with their hub, or without any hub. This is why the company is embracing Matter’s open approach. “We want to remove barriers to complexity, we want it to be simple to use, and we just want it to work,” he says. “If you want the most user-friendly system, choose ours. But if you’re an Apple user, take our bulb and onboard it to your Apple Home.”

The reboot makes Ikea one of the first major retailers to bring Matter to the mainstream market

This reboot positions Ikea as one of the first major retailers to bring Matter to the mainstream market, a potentially risky move as Matter has struggled with fragmentation, slow adoption, and other issues since its launch. But Granath is confident that it’s the right move. “Ikea is a good catalyst for the mass market, as we’re not aiming for the techy people; we can make it affordable and easy enough for the many people.”

So far, Ikea has taken a slow and steady approach to the technology, waiting for some of the kinks to be ironed out before unleashing it on Ikea customers who expect things to be simple and to just work. “We don’t want people to have a bad

experience — it’s been about timing. We’ve been waiting to find the balance of potential and user experience,” says Granath.

For Ikea, that time is here, and Granath says the team has done a lot of work to get the tech ready. But while Matter has undergone significant improvements recently, it’s yet to be fully proven in the mainstream. Is it really ready for such a big splash, I ask? “We definitely hope so,” says Granath.

What is Matter?

Developed by Apple, Amazon, Google, Samsung, and others, Matter is an open-sourced, IP-based connectivity software layer for smart home devices. It works over Wi-Fi, Ethernet, and Thread.

Thread is a low-power, wireless mesh protocol. It operates on the same 2.4GHz spectrum as Zigbee and is designed for low-power devices, such as sensors, light bulbs, plugs, and shades. IP-based, Thread devices can communicate directly with each other, the internet, and with other networks using a Thread Border Router.

Today, Matter supports most of the main device types in the home, including lighting, thermostats, locks, robot vacuums, refrigerators, dishwashers, dryers, ovens, smoke alarms, air quality monitors, EV chargers, and more.

A smart home gadget with the Matter logo can be set up and used with any Matter-compatible ecosystem via a Matter controller and controlled by more than one ecosystem with a feature called multi-admin.

Amazon Alexa, Google Home, Samsung SmartThings, Apple Home, Home Assistant, Ikea, and Aqara are among the well-known smart home companies supporting Matter, along with hundreds of device manufacturers.

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