

# COMPUTER GURU

By Don Benjamin

Technology Lab Programs sponsored by: Novi Wealth Partners

## “Dusty” and the IoT

As I write this month’s column, our robo-vacuum (whom we’ve named “Dusty”) is scurrying around the living room, sucking up flotsam and jetsam (mostly jetsam). It sometimes bangs into a wall or tries to eat a shoelace, but by and large, it does an excellent job keeping our floors clean. It departed from its recharging station in the kitchen at 4:00 a.m., and it’s been at it for almost two hours. When it’s done, Dusty will return to its recharger until its next scheduled cleaning day.

I control Dusty’s cleaning schedule on an iPhone app that communicates with Dusty over our wifi network via the internet. That means I could even start Dusty on a special cleaning mission if I’m away from home. (But I don’t because it would scare my wife if Dusty suddenly started skittering around at some random time.)

Dusty is a member of what’s known as the *Internet of Things* (IoT)—a collection of household gadgets that connect to the internet and that you can control from your smart phone, tablet, or computer. The IoT includes doorbells with built-in cameras and ovens that notify your smart phone when a burner is on. An internet-connected thermostat, such as a Nest, lets you adjust your A/C while you’re away, and a smart “hub” will turn on your house lights at dusk and off at dawn.

For less than \$50, you can buy a remote camera to help you check on your mother-in-law in Idaho, a home security system for \$15 per month, or Alexa speakers that tell you what the weather will be tomorrow. In Dubuque.

But I digress...

Dusty cost around \$200—it’s pretty much a no-frills robo-vac. We’ve had him for a couple of years, and he’s mostly well-behaved (he’s banging his head into our powder-room toilet right now). More expensive robo-vacs can memorize the layout of your home, and their cleaning paths are methodical. But Dusty’s movements are random. He’s already cleaned the foyer rug five times, and I can suspect he’s contemplating a sixth run.

He has sensors that (usually) keep him from hitting walls, and has successfully avoided committing suicide on the basement stairs (he has a drop-off sensor). But last week I had to rescue him from under a table he couldn’t negotiate, only to watch him scurry off to eat a free-range sock. No harm, but when Dusty gets stuck or frustrated or starts to choke on something, he beeps. Loudly. Then one of us will have to go find the little guy, wrest away some *schmattah* from his rotating brush, and send him on his way to bang his head against the toilet. Again. (Sigh.)

Some robo-vacs can even wet-mop your floor. And there’s a model with a built-in camera that lets you check on your dog while you’re away.<sup>1</sup> It can also recognize things like shoes and gym bag straps, which should keep errant captures to a minimum. Many can vacuum carpets better than Dusty, but they also get expensive.

But despite his occasional missteps, Dusty has been reliable. And despite cleaning every two days, he always collects an astounding amount of dust, hair, Cheerios (we take care of our toddler grandchild most mornings), plus the occasional button, dead fly, and screw—all this after we scrupulously wipe our feet or remove our shoes when entering the house.

If you’re considering making your home smarter or automating your cleaning routine, or need help with your other tech stuff, drop us an email at [tech@princetonsenior.org](mailto:tech@princetonsenior.org). You need to explain the problem, the kind of equipment you have, and your phone number. Or go to our Tech Services web page for additional information and a tech help request form.



*Dusty in his charging station after a morning run.*

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<sup>1</sup> Never, EVER, let a robo-vac run over dog poop. Just don't.