

# THE LATEST (AND GREATEST) IN HOME TECHNOLOGY AND ACCESSORIES

Homeowners, whether “techie” or home technology novices, are fervently embracing the new frontiers of home technology. “There’s something for everyone” certainly applies to the arena of home technology and accessories. From distributed audio and video and myriad sophisticated systems, to a mind boggling selection of gadgets and gizmos, technology is changing the way we live, and as a result, the way homes are designed and built.

“Builders and remodelers need to find a system that sets themselves apart, whether its distributed audio, lighting control, or even prewiring for a home theater. In this market, a point of difference is very important,” says Tony Rossini, president of Digital Lifestyles.

“There’s a real emphasis on distributed audio systems from a variety of sources. The hottest trend is iPod integration. People just love to be able to set their iPod in a dock wherever they choose and have control over it throughout the whole house,” says Bryon Sims, sales manager of Trend Technologies. One distributed audio system we’re really excited about is Sonos, a wireless system that we can retrofit into existing homes. The neat thing about it is that it has a wireless controller that can be carried around from room to room. You can listen to your iPod, but you can also listen to Internet radio and can stream your MP3 off of your computer. It plugs into the computer network and operates as part of the network. And it will stream Internet whether or not the computer is running,” says Sims.

Hunter Blandford, vice president of Elite Home Theater and Technology, says “there are tons of options opening up. You can control all your music from a touch panel or a push button control in every room you have distributed audio, as well as outside the house. Instead of having only television speakers, you can have stereo speakers for the television which sound ten times better.” He says that in the past five years, homeowners and builders are putting more acoustics in the homes, such as more high definition projectors and better surround sound.

“The sky’s the limit; it’s only a matter of what the budget will allow. People like to show off their new toys, such as flat screen televisions and media rooms. Everyone wants to keep up with the Joneses. But there’s so much new stuff out there that it can be very expensive to keep up with the Joneses,” says Blandford.

“When it comes to distributed audio, there’s a slight trend toward digital systems, but I believe conventional distributed audio is much better. In no way can a small amplifier built into a speaker deliver the same quality as a big, heavy duty power amplifier in a conventional system. We’re still very much proponents of conventional technology. New technology just for the sake of being new and different doesn’t always mean better, and that applies across the board,” says Gene Crawford, president of Crawford Entertainment Systems.

Troy Corrigan, vice president of Corrigan Electric and Home Systems, says “the biggest trend is having everything going toward being Ethernet based, operating off of the home’s internal network. And prices are coming down, basically for ev-



everything. So the consumers are getting more for their money.”

“The younger generation is tech savvy. They kind of know what they want, but the older generation needs guidance. Some people tell us they want a high end remote but we know they’d never understand it. Other people will be able to understand the total control systems. It’s important to help consumers simplify systems so they get the system that best suits their needs,” he says.

He says one product that’s garnering a lot of attention is a new 8” touch panel that has built in biometrics that scan a person’s finger. Each person in the house can have a set of features built into the touch panel. “It can be set so certain television channels or lighting schemes automatically come on when touched. Parents especially like it because it gives them the ability to lock kids out of certain channels or limits their ability to control the temperature,” he adds.

Blandford agrees that home automation is increasingly popular among consumers. “Sure, people love the idea of controlling everything from their computer or touch screen, whether it be security or lighting or music. And soon, appliances will be able to be controlled in the same way,” he says.

“There are some great new home automation products geared toward builders and remodelers that are inexpensive and feature

rich. You can install a basic system for \$5,000 or less that will distinguish the house from others in the same price range without adding a lot to the cost. You can have lighting and heating and air conditioning all controlled from a touch screen. It makes for a very dramatic presentation,” says Tony Rossini.

There’s increasing talk about structured wiring in the industry as well as among homeowners and builders. “It’s been around for awhile and it certainly is used, but it hasn’t taken off as much here because most things are customized to the homeowner’s individual needs. “We always install excess cables because we want the customer to have the ability to upgrade in the future,” says Corrigan.

“We need to do structured wiring in a house, but HDTV is a different animal, so builders need to understand that there’s more to it than just conventional structured wiring. A system needs to be designed into the house. You can’t just send an uneducated electrician who may know how to run cable television wire around the house but doesn’t know how HDTV needs to be distributed to flat panel televisions. If only power and cable are run to a flat panel television, the customer will never be able to connect an HD cable box or an HD satellite receiver to that flat panel television unless he has the cable box



or satellite receiver hanging on the wall with the television. For some reason, no one understands that," he says.

"Televisions and audio and video are different, and the needs and desires and expectations of clients are very different. They want to distribute computer music, iPod and video all over the house. The term "smart house" is a pet peeve of mine because it's a meaningless term. I see far fewer people caring about calling up the house and turning on the hot tub than having distributed audio and video around the house. You can't just wire a house for anything. You have to wire for specific things. If we tell them about lighting control and tell them how much it's going to cost, that's usually the first thing they throw under the bus. Everyone knows how to turn on lights, but they can't operate sophisticated audio video equipment. We think it's more important to sell them a simplified remote control solution for audio and video than for a simplified lighting control that costs many times more," adds Corrigan.

Home theaters are transitioning from the wish lists to the "must have" lists of many homeowners. "In the past 5 years, they're putting more acoustics in the room, more high definition projectors, better surround sound. There are many more options than before, such as game stations and media players to store all of the DVDs, says Blandford.

"As far as home theaters are concerned, the sky's the limit. They can cost a million dollars, but those are the elite of the elite. For just the basics, such as a 7.1 surround sound receiver, projector and screen, DVD player and high definition satellite or cable, the cost would begin around \$10,000," according to Blandford.

Gene Crawford is seeing home theaters designed to have more of a family atmosphere, with couches instead of traditional theater chairs, and many times a bar, game area, perhaps even an exercise area. "I think the home theater is often becoming more of a general purpose room. People can still dim the lights and watch the movie or a game," he says.

For those people who don't want to dedicate an entire room to a home theater, the living room or family room can be transformed into a media room by installing a flat screen television and surround system.

"Large flat panel televisions and projectors are getting progressively better and less expensive. We can now do better audio than before because the projector of a \$10,000 television would blow too much of the budget and the client wouldn't want to spend a lot more on better quality audio. But now that 42" plasma televisions are in the \$1,200 - \$1,500 range, we can complete the theater with acoustical wall treatments, nice seats and better quality audio," says Crawford.

"On the other hand, it gives us the ability to install \$6,000 - \$7,000 complete theater systems on the low end, so home theater systems are opened up to many more people," he adds.

"The new high definition DVD players are incredible. Unfortunately, many of the big box stores, and in fact, much of the industry is pushing LCD flat panel televisions over plasma TVs because the price for flat panels has been lowered so much that manufacturers aren't making money on them. But, plasma TVs look better and have better quality video," says Crawford.

If you want to stay ahead of the home technology curve, you might want to pay attention to the advice of Tony Rossini who says, "Motion simulation is becoming more of a force to deal with in this market. Motion codes were recently encoded on certain blue ray disks. They're the next big thing in home theater. You can them onto a sofa or a recliner to make a motion simulator."

What about those homeowners who want an over-the-top home theater and for whom money isn't an issue. If they subscribe to the theory that "bigger is better", they're in for a big surprise they may jump on. Rossini says one vendor has just introduced a 103" plasma television that weights over 500 pounds. The price for that jumping? 100,000.

Just as we said, there really is something for everyone.

THE LATEST IN  
GREATER LOUISVILLE  
GARDENING, PRODUCTS,  
INSIDER TIPS AND OF  
COURSE EVERYTHING

home design



LOOK FOR IT AT THE HOME, GARDEN  
& REMODELING SHOW, YOUR LOCAL  
BOOK RETAILER AND CRAFT STORE



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