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SCORING
GIANT
CLIENTS

How to discreetly nurture high-profile referrals, like Super Bowl MVP Eli Manning.

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Paul Austi (left)
Audio Video Crafts
Long Island, N.Y. and
Giants QB Eli Manning

The Lone-Component Proposal

The notion of portability didn't start with the iPod, but customers have quickly come to embrace the concept of content portability, even as it pertains to fixed installations, like home theaters and multi-zone audio systems.

The customer watching the basketball finals or latest blockbuster in the home theater will automatically assume he can walk to kitchen and, at the very least, keep listening to game or action sequence as he grabs another beer and a slice of pizza. Furthermore, customers are likely to presume that no matter where they are in the home, they'll have quick access to a keypad or controller.

As all we know, however, it's not always that simple.

The Multi-Source, Multi-Zone Puzzle
Integrating a home theater with a whole-home (multi-source, multi-zone) audio system can become a costly and complicated process — so much so that, in some cases, customers may just decide to skip it (costing you money not spent). This would be unfortunate since home theater should be the kind of entertainment experience that encourages consumers to integrate and upgrade their accessibility and distribution.

While the technology and products certainly exist to do these things, the cost and configuration of such systems can be considerably more than most people are willing to spend. From the rising cost for commodities (like the copper used in wiring) to the more technical issues of conveying and switching signals, maintaining signal quality and programming controllers (not to mention operating multiple devices from multiple locations), the task of integrating a home theater into a whole-home audio system may require more than most consumers expect.

A Single-Component Solution
From the installer's perspective, ease of installation, integration and overall system reliability will all factor into the creation of desirable, cost-competitive and, hopefully, persuasive proposals for clients.

In an ideal scenario, integrating a home theater with a multiroom system would be accomplished by a single component — one capable not only of carrying the audio content (as digital or analog), but also equipped to convey system control signals and the metadata that frequently and increasingly accompanies the content. The component would also need to be completely transparent to users, whose only concern should be what they want to listen to and in what room (or rooms) they wish to hear it.

For flexibility, the device must have bi-directional IR communication (including multiple IR outputs) as well as both RS-232 and Ethernet so as to easily interface with the latest A/V receivers, Web-enabled and network-based devices and audio separates from one or more manufacturers. Of course, a preferred single-component integration solution will also permit remote access for programming, troubleshooting and software upgrades so that house calls, if not eliminated, are minimized. The component should also have low power consumption, lowered carbon emissions and reduced demands on cooling or ventilation systems.

While the current state of the economy may curtail some consumer spending, enterprising installers will use the momentum of the DTV transition to produce new business opportunities for integrating home theaters with whole-home audio systems. Working with an audio platform that supports home theater integration will give installers the best opportunity to capitalize on that once-in-a-lifetime technology transition. ■

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