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## PLUS:

- Creating a Culture of Learning in Your Business
- The Industry According to Buying Groups
- Tech Showcase on Soundbars

# COMPANIES TO WATCH 2025

Looking Back at the Year That Was,  
With an Eye Toward What's Next



## Review:

Sony BRAVIA Theater Bar 9  
Dolby Atmos Soundbar



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Time again to look at the biggest news of the past year with an eye toward what it means for 2025. Illustration: z\_wei/Getty Images.

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# Companies to Count

BY ANTHONY SAVONA

**T**his issue holds our seventh annual "Companies to Watch" feature, and since the story itself is both nostalgic and future-facing, I thought it would be interesting to look back at previous editions to see if they had any industry trends to reveal.

I primarily looked at the number of entries, which, yes, meant I went back and physically counted the number of companies and associations in each one. You can double-check me if you want, but the reason I did it was so you don't have to. Here are the results:

- 2018's story had 36 companies
- 2019's story had 47 companies
- 2020's story had 81 companies
- 2021's story had 88 companies
- 2022's story had 92 companies
- 2023's story had 116 companies
- This year's story also has 116 companies.

We can ignore 2018 altogether, as I am certain there were more than 36 notable companies to watch, but I was just a few months into this job and full immersion into the channel, so that's on me. 2019 was a little better, but I still had some work to do.

Maybe it was being stranded in my house for most of it, but by 2020 I was getting the hang of it with a proper amount of companies that matched the rhythm of the channel, which continues through the current edition.

I found the steady growth to be interesting because, with all the mergers and acquisitions that have happened over the past few years, you'd think the number would go down. Indeed, as I was running through each story, counting companies, I noticed many names that are still represented on this year's list, just as part of larger organizations now.

For all the acquisitions, the list has been bolstered by new product categories entering the industry — there are quite a few lighting and shade companies on this year's list.

For the curious, there is no science behind the making of this list. We put a call out to the industry for success stories from the past year or a tease for the next. Those responses are combined with an annual review of all the news and product stories posted on [residentialsystems.com](http://residentialsystems.com). Not every company is mentioned, naturally, but we look for companies with several releases or at least one



truly notable one.

As I was looking through seven years of these things, there were companies I was surprised were not on this year's list, which prompted a double-check to make sure I hadn't missed them. But R&D takes time, and I have seen companies go quiet for a time before a big announcement, and I bet they will be back next year.

Still, regardless of the number of entries, the stories they tell about the wins of this year make for an impressive roundup and confirmation that this is an amazing business to be part of.

*Tony*

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Henry Clifford is president of Livewire, an integration firm in Richmond, VA. He also serves on the CEDIA Business Working Group and writes a bi-monthly blog for [www.residentialsystems.com](http://www.residentialsystems.com).



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SCAN FOR  
SPECS AND  
DIAGRAMS

# One of These Days, POW! Right in the KISR!



Keeping it simple *and* relatable is the best way to engage an audience.

BY KATIE MCGREGOR BENNETT

Technology's role in our line of work is simple: to make people's lives easier and more enjoyable. Yet the messaging many tend to use in their marketing and sales efforts is engineering- or spec-driven, highly technical, overwhelming, or assumes too much familiarity. In that case, clients, prospects, and trade partners often feel alienated and dismiss what's being offered as unnecessary or even intimidating.

The solution? K-I-S-R — Keep it Simple and Relatable.

## Why Simplified Messaging Matters

While home technology can add convenience and luxury, many potential customers may initially view it as complex or intimidating. A survey by CEDIA, for example, reveals that clients often want technology that is easy to use and understand rather than overwhelming or overly complex. As I've shared in other columns, the best way to engage new users is to strip down the complexity and talk in terms that resonate on a personal level.

You may be reading this and thinking, "That's easy, I've been selling AV for decades!" Challenge yourself to put that confidence to the test. Write a promotional narrative for one product or service you want to sell more of that addresses the needs of the least knowledgeable person in a specific audience segment you want to attract, using 50 words or less, zero acronyms, and basic language. What image would you pair with that? Not easy.

As part of your annual planning, go through this exercise with stakeholders and sort out the language you'll use to reach the audiences you seek. It will be both enlightening and beneficial, and the outcome will be useful.

Here are a few key strategies for keeping your marketing language simple.

- **Skip the Jargon.** Tech talk can make a brand seem authoritative, but it can also put off potential customers who are unfamiliar with the field.
- **Use Relatable Language and References.** Connect with clients on a personal level by referencing everyday scenarios that show how your technology offering fits into their lives. People need to see how your product can solve a real problem or enhance their day-to-day lives.
- **Don't Assume People Want Complex Technology.** People generally want technology that "just works" without requiring too much interaction or maintenance. Brands and businesses should therefore

focus on promoting ease-of-use and reliability rather than over-emphasizing advanced features that require technical knowledge. Promote features that show how easy it is to operate, like voice commands or app-driven experiences.

- **Share Fun and Unique Use Cases.** Showing people how tech can be enjoyable and enhance their lifestyle in new ways can be a big draw. Show them how you can deliver personalized and customized experiences. Talk about scenes that create memorable moments, like movie nights with lights that dim automatically, or for holidays or events with color-changing lighting and preset playlists. Some have had success touting audio systems that bring the concert experience into the living room. However, in recent experience, even "audio" may not be a term some are familiar with, which again illustrates the need to scrutinize every word used.

Adapt your approach based on the primary needs and concerns of the audience you seek to engage

After you've implemented this and have analyzed the results of a more targeted approach, what did you learn? Was there a particular segment that leaned in more or a category or conversation style that resonated more? Perhaps the timing was right or the visuals were spot-on. Ask people what drew them to your brand or business and then iterate based on that feedback.

Remember, marketing should meet clients, prospects, and trade partners (or whoever your audience is) where they are, with clear, relatable, and enjoyable content that shows how technology can make their lives better. When brands and businesses avoid jargon, use compelling visuals to explain concepts, and make tech accessible, people will feel more inclined to engage and explore.

Clarity and simplicity are key to capturing and retaining an audience eager to understand just how technology can enhance their home experience. If you focus on this as you develop and refine your marketing plan for the year ahead, you will likely establish a more engaged audience that has a deeper interest in what you're offering. **Res**

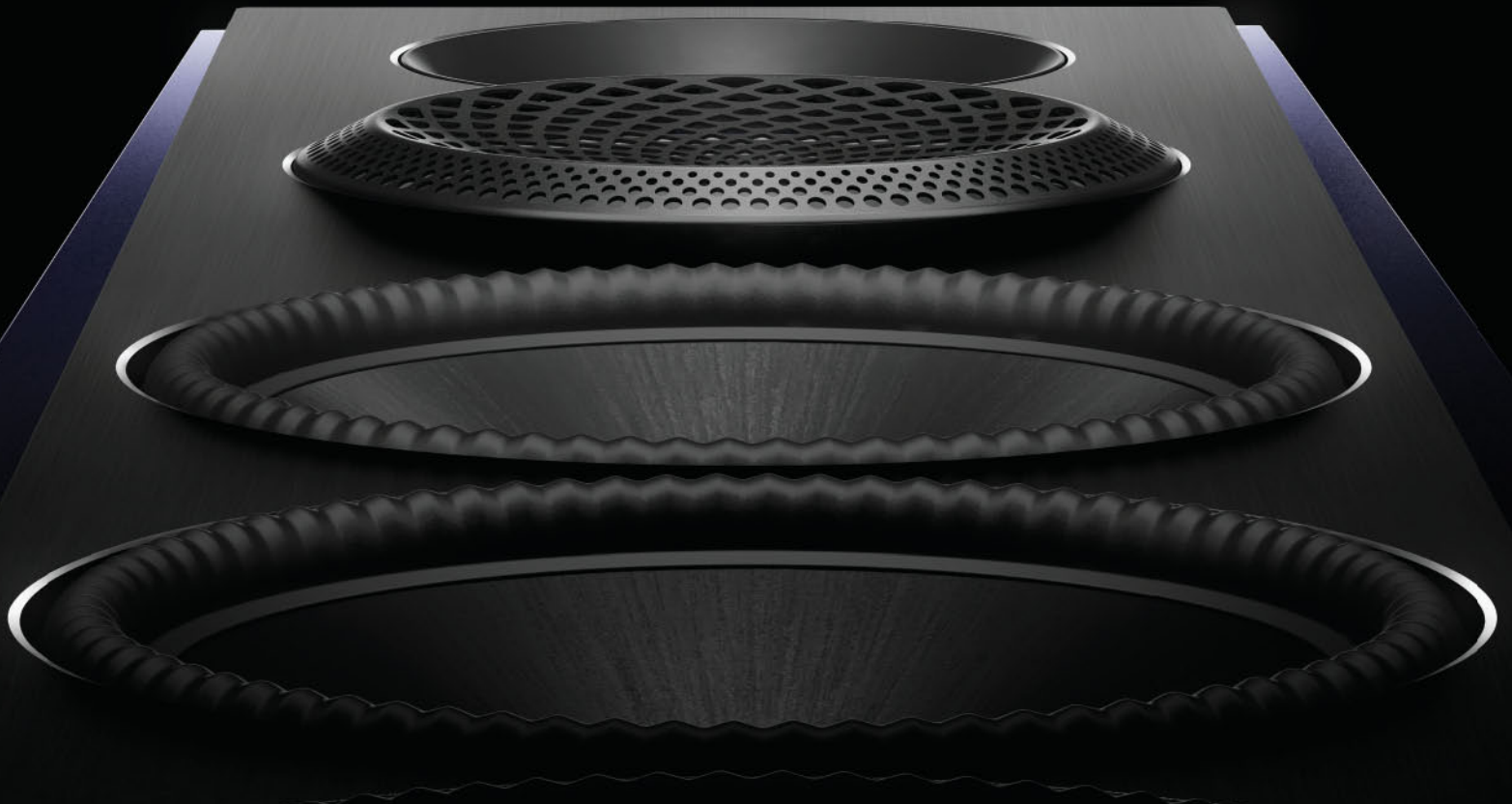
*Not sure where to start or how to get off-center with this concept? Drop me a line — I can provide a few quick tips and if you'd like to know more, we can schedule time for a deep dive. KMB@kmbcomm.com.*

"Write a promotional narrative for one product or service you want to sell more of that addresses the needs of the least knowledgeable person in a specific audience segment you want to attract, using 50 words or less, zero acronyms, and basic language. Not easy."



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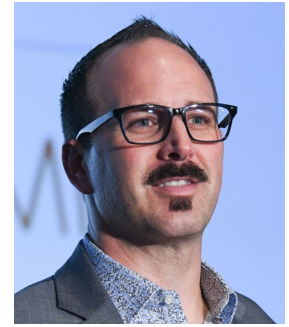


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# Letting Go to Grow

How to use the power of delegation for business success.

BY MATT BERNATH



As a business owner, especially in the luxury home service or custom integration industries, it can be difficult to let go of control. Many of us believe that “if I don’t do it myself, it won’t be done right.” Whether you’re running a small team or working solo, there’s a sense of pride that comes from overseeing every aspect of your business. However, here’s the hard truth: if you try to do everything yourself, you’re not growing a business — you’re simply maintaining one.

This article draws inspiration from a recent episode of *The Flywheel Effect* podcast, where Brent Sonnek-Schmelz and I discussed the challenges business owners face when it comes to delegation. Whether you’re managing installations, handling sales, or overseeing project timelines, effective delegation is the key to unlocking growth. Let’s dive into the key principles of delegation, how to avoid common pitfalls, and practical strategies to help you delegate with confidence.

## Abdication vs. Delegation: What’s the Difference?

One of the biggest challenges in leadership is learning the difference between abdication and delegation. Abdication happens when you assign a task to someone without giving clear direction, expecting them to handle it entirely on their own. When things go wrong, you might feel frustrated or disappointed, thinking, “I knew I should’ve done it myself!” This hands-off approach can result in low-quality work, missed deadlines, and, ultimately, resentment on both sides.

On the other hand, delegation involves assigning responsibility while remaining engaged enough to ensure success. It’s not about dumping tasks on someone else — it’s about empowering them with the tools, guidance, and support they need to complete the task at a high standard. In essence, delegation is a partnership between you and your team, where you provide the framework for success but trust them to execute.

The difference between these two approaches lies in how much structure and oversight you provide. Successful delegation requires clear communication of what you expect, why the task is important, and how success will be measured.

## Why Delegation Is Crucial for Growth

No matter how skilled or hardworking you are, it’s impossible to scale a business without delegation. If you’re constantly involved in the day-to-day operations — whether that’s on the job site, managing client calls, or handling every sales lead — you’re limiting your company’s potential.

“By allowing your team to learn from those mistakes and improve, you’re creating a culture of growth and development.”

Effective delegation is what allows your business to scale beyond your personal time and energy. It lets you focus on higher-level activities like strategy, growth, and client relationships while empowering your team to handle the operational side. In a project-based industry like custom integration, delegation is particularly important because it allows you to manage multiple projects simultaneously, rather than being tied down to one job at a time.

## The Four-Step Process for Successful Delegation

Delegation is often easier said than done. Many business owners struggle with letting go because they’re afraid the work won’t be done to their standards. To overcome this, consider a structured approach to delegation that ensures both clarity and accountability. Here’s a four-step process to help you delegate effectively:

- 1. Lay the Groundwork:** Start by clearly explaining the task or project, including its importance and how it impacts the business. This gives your team members context and helps them understand why their work matters. When people feel connected to the bigger picture, they’re more likely to be invested in doing their best.
- 2. Get Buy-In:** Once you’ve laid out the task, it’s important to gauge whether the person is confident and prepared to handle it. Ask for their feedback and ensure they have the necessary resources. If they push back or express doubts, you may need to provide additional guidance or training.
- 3. Provide Training and Define Success:** Delegation isn’t about assigning tasks and walking away. You need to equip your team with the right tools and training. Additionally, set clear expectations for what success looks like. Whether it’s specific KPIs, deadlines, or quality benchmarks, give them a roadmap to follow. This helps prevent miscommunication and ensures both you and your team are aligned.
- 4. Check-In and Provide Feedback:** Regular check-ins are crucial to making sure the task stays on track. This doesn’t mean micromanaging, but rather maintaining a rhythm of communication where you can offer guidance, answer questions, and course-correct if needed. It’s also an opportunity to provide feedback, so the person knows what they’re doing well and where there’s room for improvement.

## Overcoming the “Doer” Mentality

One of the biggest roadblocks to effective delegation is the “doer” mentality. When you’re stuck in the doer mentality, you’re constantly in the weeds — handling every task yourself because you believe no one else can do it as well as you. This might work for a while, but as your business grows, it becomes unsustainable. If you’re the only one who can “do it right,” you’ll eventually burn out and your business will stagnate.

The key to overcoming this mindset is to recognize that delegation doesn’t mean sacrificing quality — it means training your team to meet



your standards. As a leader, your job is not just to get the work done but to develop the people around you so that they can take ownership and excel in their roles.

### Perfection vs. Progress

A major challenge in delegating is the fear that tasks won't be done perfectly, but perfection is often the enemy of progress. Many business owners set impossibly high standards, believing that if a task isn't done exactly their way, it's a failure. This mindset leads to micromanagement, frustration, and, ultimately, a stunted business.

The reality is that good delegation isn't about perfection — it's about progress. A useful benchmark to consider is aiming for 80% of what you would do yourself. If the person you've delegated to can deliver 80% of the result you'd expect, that's a success. Over time, they'll improve, and with your guidance, they might even surpass your expectations. But if you never give them the opportunity to try, they'll never grow, and neither will your business.

As you begin to delegate more, remind yourself that small mistakes are part of the learning process. By allowing your team to learn from those mistakes and improve, you're creating a culture of growth and development.

### Delegation as a Multiplier for Your Business

Delegation isn't just about getting tasks off your plate—it's about multiplying your impact. When you delegate effectively, you free yourself to focus on the areas of your business that truly require your attention: strategy, client relationships, and innovation. Delegation allows you to scale your time, your expertise, and your business.

Think of delegation as an investment. The time you spend training your team today will pay off in the long run as they become more capable of handling critical tasks on their own. You'll be able to take on more projects, serve more clients, and drive greater growth — all without being spread too thin.

If you found these insights helpful and want to dive deeper into topics like delegation and leadership, check out The Flywheel Effect podcast. You can find it on your favorite podcasting app, where Brent Sonnek-Schmelz and Matt Bernath explore practical strategies for business owners looking to take their companies to the next level. [Res](#)

*If you found these insights helpful, check out The Flywheel Effect podcast. You can find it on your favorite podcasting app.*



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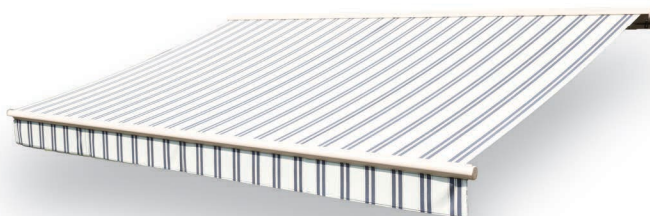
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**LIPPERT**

# Creating a Culture of Learning

Stave off stagnation by encouraging your team to always be trying new things.



BY HENRY CLIFFORD

I found myself feeling stagnant recently and couldn't put a finger on it. Why was I walking in cement? Then it dawned on me that it had been a while since I'd set any personal goals. I'm usually working toward something; whether it's a race like the Ironman 70.3 or a certification like the Certified Flight Instructor credential. I'd gotten burned out after earning my commercial pilot rating in February and hadn't picked up anything new since. Stagnation had clearly set in.

Inertia is a powerful force. After all, a body at rest tends to stay at rest. I'm exceedingly good at resting. We humans are wildly comfortable with the status quo and loathe to change. At the same time, we all crave novelty... to a point. If that novelty requires a lot of energy to achieve (climbing Mount Everest), inertia is right there to stop us cold. If the novelty is low effort (mindlessly scrolling social media), we'll pick it every time, even though we know it's not the right choice long term.

Why are we such lazy beasts? Biology deserves much of the blame. It's in our nature to conserve energy and stick with the familiar. The antidote to this intellectual stagnation is to "kedge" a bit. In his book *Younger Next Year*, Chris Crowley describes the act of intentional goal setting as a means of always having something to look forward to in life. That could be a trip, a race — really anything, as long as it's on the schedule and far enough out to generate feelings of anticipation.

Different personalities approach kedgeing very differently. Type A business owners might consciously choose to kedge because it's a little more hardwired in their psyches. However, one size most certainly does not fit all. Consider the benefits of a company where kedgeing with learning is the norm. Leaders talk about what they're working on and celebrate the wins of others at all-hands meetings or using employee engagement platforms like Lattice or TINYpulse.

I shared my kedgeing idea with our leadership team and admonished myself. "I've gotten off track," I said. "Time has slipped by, and I let it happen. What if we all picked something to work on and modeled that for the rest of the company?"

I stressed that our kedges needn't all be about custom installation, but they should be about learning. Whether someone wants to become a lighting designer, dog catcher, or lifeguard, we're going to start making a big deal out of these accomplishments.

Companies like Audible do a great job of nudging us along and giving some guidance around how we might launch a "kedgeing through learning" program. I feel guilty when I see a new Audible credit show up in my inbox and I haven't listened to a book recently. Nobody likes feeling behind the 8-ball, and their credit system leverages those emotions wonderfully.

Here are some implementation solutions to consider:

- 1. Make It Fun** — Consider launching your "love of learning" journey at an upcoming meeting with stories shared from leadership team members who've recently accomplished some micro goals. Keeping the initiative as close to a game as possible will ensure you get off to a great start!
- 2. Let Them Choose** — Stress that their learning kedge should be something they're excited about. I'm always amazed at the direction our initiatives take when we put decision-making in the hands of our employees. This is no different. You'll be amazed at the wide range of interests within your organization and the opportunities to learn from one another. Consider showcasing some wild certification examples like these (all real): Professional Mermaid, Laughter Yoga, Chocolate Taster, or Ham Radio. Of course, there are other practical examples that are inexpensive and well within reach: CPR, Project Management Professional (PMP), Notary, CTS (AVIXA), or CIT (CEDIA).
- 3. Stick With It** — It's easy to start something, but much harder to sustain it. Stress to your team that treating learning as a journey and not a destination is the ultimate goal. Draw a line between certain learning and professional growth (CEDIA or AVIXA certifications) or share stories around how getting a certification in a completely unrelated field can make them a better professional, significant other, or parent. Consider linking compensation rewards with certain certifications, and publish those opportunities publicly.
- 4. Keep It Simple** — This effort should be about priming the pump and getting the team in the habit of chasing down learning goals. The fewer regulations and constraints you wrap around the initial launch, the more likely the routines will form.
- 5. Praise, Praise, Praise** — Make a big deal out of small accomplishments, especially in the early days. Employees love recognition and heaping on the praise in an all-hands meeting or a 1-to-1 check-in can go a long way toward driving employee engagement in the right direction.
- 6. Don't Boil the Ocean** — Company initiatives are sometimes cursed with trying to do too much all at once. If you can end up with an environment where you can ask any of your employees, "What are you working on next?" that's a home run.

Imagine implementing a "kedgeing through learning" program inside your company and praising your employees on their accomplishments each month from here on out. What changes do you anticipate seeing? How much happier and fulfilled will you and your employees be?

Good luck, stay frosty, and see you in the field. [Res](#)



# Introducing **Artafex**

Artafex isn't just a new DMF product line; it's a philosophy. In ancient Latin, it meant "artisan," a master of their craft, someone who poured their heart and soul into every creation. It's a commitment to quality and a celebration of the enduring value of craftsmanship.

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# COMPANIES TO WATCH 2025

Looking back at the year that was, with an eye toward the one coming up.

Compiled by Anthony Savona

**I**f you are about to read the “Companies to Watch” feature, then it must be December! It is time again to reflect on the year that was while we look ahead to the one that’s approaching. Here are some of 2024’s best wins mixed in with some forecasting for 2025.

**Abode:** In 2024, Abode expanded its powerful product lineup with two dynamic solutions that enhance home security. With AI-at-the-edge technology, a transmission range of over 1.5 miles, and exceptional battery life, the Abode Edge Camera can be installed anywhere on the property — even on perimeter fences — to provide an entirely new perspective of the home. Also debuting this year, the Abode Lock offers a simple, retrofit solution for renters and homeowners, with secure fingerprint and PIN access for entry.

**Access Networks:** Access Networks further ingrained itself in the Snap One ecosystem in August with the integration of OvrC in its products. Five Wi-Fi 6 Unleashed access points in the Access Networks portfolio support OvrC, including an outdoor B350 access point.

**ADI:** 2024 marked a transformative year for ADI and Snap One as they united — merging their teams, strengths, and capabilities to deliver greater value to customers. The combined business is well-positioned to continue enhancing its omnichannel customer experience with a broader range of products and brands, increased shopping convenience, local expertise, and significant investments in its product portfolio. They opened their first combined store in Omaha, Neb., showcasing the best offerings across ADI and Snap One in one location. Additional store openings are planned for 2025.

**AiSPiRE:** AiSPiRE had a strong showing at CEDIA Expo with its Astro Micro Dim-to-Warm Downlight, DMX-to-ELV Dimming Controller, and Colorscaping

system. It also showed its new Modern Forms Smart Fans. The products from this CI-centered lighting brand are coming at a quick pace.

**AlarMax:** AlarMax celebrated a significant milestone in 2024 with the launch of its e-commerce platform, designed to enhance the ordering experience for dealers and distributors while upholding the company’s commitment to exceptional customer service. Alongside e-commerce, AlarMax opened branches in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Albuquerque, N.M., to bring on-site product inventory, training, vendor events, and hands-on support to even more customers nationwide. AlarMax also expanded its vendor roster and leadership team this year.

**Alfred International:** Over the course of the last year, Alfred International made significant strides in the smart lock industry thanks to the U.S. launches of both the DB2S and ML2 Smart Locks. The DB2S stood out with its sleek design, robust security, and RFID card access, while the ML2 Smart Mortise Lock offered a practical retrofit solution for older locks, combining advanced security with Wi-Charge wireless power. Both locks feature Z-Wave Long Range.

**Arlington:** Arlington’s products are the solution to fast, easy installation of Class 2 low-voltage communications, computer, and CATV wiring/connections. Its non-metallic Split Wall Plates accommodate pre-connectorized low-voltage cable(s), as shipped, or with split grommets that alter the size of the opening. The LV1S plated steel mounting bracket’s unique X-shaped bracket provides excellent stability and secure four-corner support for low-voltage devices/cables.

**Autonomic:** In October, Autonomic introduced the M5 Professional Music Server, the flagship of its next-generation M Series products. Designed to deliver high-quality audio performance alongside robust streaming and integration capabilities, the M5 Pro is designed for both high-end residential and commercial applications.



**AVPro Global Holdings:** AVPro Global Holdings is the parent company of AVPro Edge, AudioControl Pro, Bullet Train, ThenAudio, and Murideo audio/video distribution products, delivering class-leading AV solutions and support services. AVPro Global has invested in its own engineering and manufacturing capabilities to efficiently develop best-in-class integrator-centric AV products. Today, AVPro Global brands are developing high-performance audio/video products, backed by training and service, to support integrators worldwide.

**Azione Unlimited:** Azione Unlimited has appointed Patrick McCarthy as its new executive director, and at the group's Fall Conference, he said he is looking to fulfill the group's mission of providing resources and opportunities that address members' needs and help them grow in ways they hadn't imagined.

**Blackwire Designs:** Blackwire continues its focus on innovation and dealer support by rolling out new services, software, and training. This year, the company took home CE Pro BEST and Residential Systems Best of Show honors at CEDIA 2024 for the new Network Provisioning Service, which enables integrators to receive fully configured, updated, labeled, and installation-ready networking equipment straight out of the box from Blackwire. Available for free upon purchase of eligible networking products, this service eliminates the need for time-consuming setup and troubleshooting on-site, ensuring a seamless and cost-efficient installation process. In 2025, the company plans to expand further into competitive categories — lighting, networking, and AV-over-IP — adding software drivers, expansion to the Blacklight Design Tool, and more.

**Bloomsbury Cinema Lab:** Bloomsbury Cinema Lab is a top South Korean cinema screen manufacturer and engineering firm that has equipped over 10,000 world-class theaters and high-end showrooms worldwide. Previewed at CEDIA 2024, its flagship Liberty Wide series screens are mounted on a 1.1mm aluminum plate with the front left, center, and front right speakers built in behind the screen. The aluminum back plate plays a dual role as a vibrating panel against which the speaker driver units are attached to produce audio. The screen material is affixed to its rigid aluminum plate, enhancing picture quality to the ultimate image possible. Bloomsbury's unique optical coating technology delivers unparalleled color and contrast to every frame and helps projectors perform at their best.

**Bond:** Launched only several years ago in the CEDIA channel, now with approximately 2000 dealers and steadily climbing — and sales partnerships with Screen Innovations, Draper at Home, MagnaTrack, Savant, and others — the Bond control platform has experienced an average growth rate of 70% these past four years. Featured at 16 manufacturer booths at CEDIA Expo 2024, the Bond home device control platform brings fingertip management of ceiling fans, motorized shades, louvers, screens, and now outdoor heating, cooling, and low-voltage LED lighting systems. The latest brands to connect with Bond include Hunter Douglas, Sol-Lux, and Vantage, with more on the way.



Coastal Source

**Bravas:** The luxury home experience company prepared for its next phase of growth by bringing on two new board members this past June — Susan Michaels and Wynnee Yang Sade. Keep an eye on them throughout 2025.

**BRIDGE:** The Bridge design team has a background in aerospace engineering and is skilled at spotting and resolving high-speed signal transmission issues, giving its products a performance advantage in the audio and visual transmission fields. With the rapid development of the AV industry, especially the transmission technological innovation as part of the high-speed development of video technology, Bridgee has achieved a breakthrough in the performance of HDMI fiber optic cables, with further enhancement of image contrast, color depth, and sound dynamics.

**C2G:** C2G recently marked 40 years of delivering reliable connectivity solutions. The company has invested heavily in the latest testing technology, including 8K video and USB4 to ensure every cable and device perform as expected. Formerly known as Cables to Go, C2G is dedicated to fully testing its products, providing the reliability that customers need for AV and IT applications. Looking ahead, the company plans to stay at the forefront of technology while refreshing legacy product lines. C2G will also expand into adjacent categories like fiber, power, audio, custom, and OEM cables.

**CATalyzing and VideoMojo:** CATalyzing is a full-service marketing agency driving growth for hundreds of top technology integrators, vendors, buying groups, and the CI community at large. Led by industry veteran Cat Toomey, CATalyzing delivers expert creativity through fully custom branding, digital and physical ads, blogs, e-newsletters, websites, PR, social media, marketing strategy, collateral, turnkey digital campaigns, company-wide signatures, SEO, online B2C home planning tools, and more. In 2024, it expanded with VideoMojo, which has the industry's largest library of current, relevant lifestyle, and technology content and delivers custom-branded videos without the time and cost of onsite video shoots. The company also offers onsite location video services.

**CEDIA:** The association had a big year in 2024, making headway in its advocacy efforts and adding a new membership pricing tier. With the U.S. Government announcing the review of the 2018 SOC for potential revision in 2028, CEDIA will no doubt continue to apply pressure for change and establish Technology Integrator as its own occupational code.

**CEDIA Expo:** The industry's largest North American tradeshow heads back to the Denver Convention Center for its third consecutive year. This year's trends included MicroLED video walls and plenty of buzz around lighting. What will the 2025 event bring?

**Chief:** This year, Chief introduced the Tempo Flat Panel In-Wall Mount System, an all-in-one solution that streamlines ordering and installation. Its design helps installers maximize efficiency through every phase from rough-in construction to AV system commissioning. There's no need to cut wall studs to accommodate flat panel VESA patterns, and the mount is UL-approved for steel stud installation. As part of Legrand | AV, Chief continues its 45-year legacy of delivering innovative, installer-inspired solutions.

**Cleerline Technology Group:** Cleerline's SSF Fiber (Stronger, Safer, Faster-to-terminate) delivers higher bandwidth, supporting gigabit and multi-gigabit speeds required for modern smart home devices, 4K/8K streaming, gaming, and other bandwidth-intensive applications. Integrators will appreciate that Cleerline SSF fiber is faster to terminate than category cable, with the field-installable connectors eliminating the challenges of legacy fiber solutions.

**Coastal Source:** In 2024, Coastal Source took outdoor audio and lighting to new heights with a major Kennedy Space Center event serving as the background for the launch of several new lighting and audio products, including EVO Landscape Lighting, Pathfinder Omnidirectional Speakers, Bollard 1000 Speakers, and CUBE Subwoofer. The addition of a lighting design director and the continued growth of Coastal Source's popular Design Services Program

further strengthened the company's complete portfolio of products and services.

**Cogent360:** Cogent360's Visualize technology is transforming the way CE manufacturers empower sales teams and integrators. Known for creating immersive sales tools and training for industry leaders, Cogent360 produces hyper-realistic 3D experiences that illustrate complex tech features in compelling, interactive formats. The company is on the brink of a new era, poised to extend these next-gen tools to integrators, enabling them to deliver dynamic, memorable client experiences virtually anywhere. In 2025, look for Cogent360 to set a new standard in sales enablement for integrators, making connected experiences not only accessible but unforgettable in today's connected home landscape.

**Crestron Electronics:** Crestron continues to develop its Creston Home OS, including more than 20 new features and integrations that premiered at CEDIA Expo. Crestron is also pushing the AV-over-IP envelope with additions to its DM NVX line. Showing off all that and more, in October, Crestron unveiled its new flagship experience center in New York City.

**D-Tools:** In 2025, D-Tools will continue to pursue its mission to help integrators run better businesses with several new innovations. The company's 2025 product roadmap includes new modules for inventory management and job costing, along with deeper design integrations for D-Tools Cloud. This carries on D-Tools' 2024 momentum that saw the release of System Integrator v22 and the D-Tools Payments solution for D-Tools Cloud.

**Da-Lite:** Da-Lite has been on a roll. In 2022, Da-Lite revolutionized projection screens with the SightLine Cable Drop, giving the appearance of a floating screen without the traditional black drop. It simplified installations by allowing on-site adjustments, eliminating the need for precise drop calculations. Initially offered with Tensioned Advantage and Advantage recessed screens, Da-Lite expanded the feature into the new Myriad system. This year, Da-Lite also introduced the re-engineered Parallax Thin screen, an ALR surface designed for ultrashort throw projectors, offering an easy-to-install, ultrawide screen solution with cost-efficient, standard parcel shipping.

**Daisy:** With expertise in the home services industry, Daisy has taken a leadership role in helping integration firms thrive through a unique franchise model focused on professional development, business efficiency, and employee and customer satisfaction. Launched in early 2024, Daisy significantly expanded its national footprint, signing on numerous prominent integration businesses as new Daisy franchisees or corporate offices in 13 locations and counting. Since joining Daisy, these companies have collectively benefited from a range of Daisy-exclusive programs, including technician training and career development, healthcare and retirement benefits, sales and marketing support, and more. Much-needed industry support like this has empowered these existing and future Daisy integration firms to scale their operations, improve service delivery, and create revenue opportunities.

**Digital Projection, a Brand of Delta:** Building on a successful 2024 marked by the introduction of solutions like the Radiance Home LED video wall, Digital Projection showcased a comprehensive portfolio spanning diverse applications. From

projection mapping in public spaces and high-performance home theater projection to large-scale digital signage, its offerings covered a wide range of environments. In 2025, the company plans to further expand its reach into emerging markets, refine its imaging technologies to stay ahead of industry trends, and deliver next-generation imaging solutions for its growing customer base.

**Dirac:** Dirac has made significant strides throughout 2024, forging and strengthening key partnerships with top brands such as Bluesound, Onkyo, Peerless, and more, to transform listening experiences and optimize sound for more users. A standout achievement for the company was its debut into the soundbar market, with its Dirac Live Room Correction technology being integrated into the brand-new Klipsch Flexus Core 300 soundbar.

**DMF Lighting:** DMF Lighting will continue to solidify its position as a leading lighting fixture partner for custom integrators in 2025. Building on the success of 2024, which saw the launch of the Artafex line with advanced DALI-enabled lighting solutions, DMF has redefined the standard for modular downlighting. The Artafex line's True Spectrum technology offers high-quality color rendering, transforming spaces into vibrant showcases. Looking ahead, DMF is poised to unveil new game-changing solutions, providing integrators with even more versatility to elevate their projects and deliver unmatched lighting experiences in luxury residential spaces.

**Draper At Home:** Draper continues to serve the CI channel with projection screens and indoor and outdoor shades. Showing its commitment, in April, Draper promoted Tabi Quick to the newly created position of national director of CI where she fosters relationships with national independent rep firms and represents Draper At Home with CEDIA buying groups.

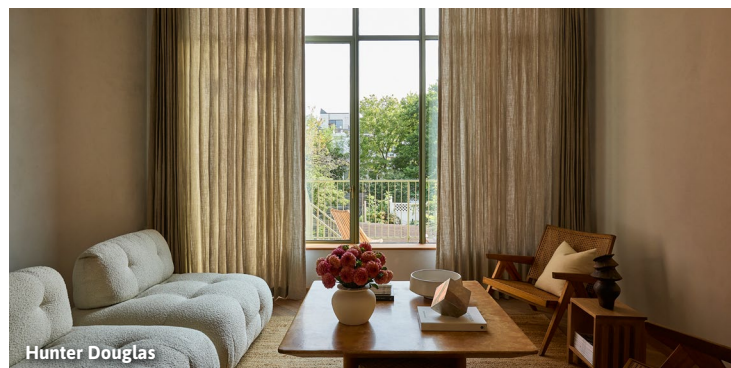
**Elliston Systems & Design:** The integration company recently completed a world-class home theater in Fairview, Texas, featuring a 13.7.8 JBL Synthesis system with two Ascendo infrasonic subwoofers. While the theater is connected to the house, it can operate at Dolby reference levels while being imperceptible from anywhere else. The room within a room uses three floor systems and three wall structures. The wall shared with the house is 38 inches thick and the entry includes an airlock vestibule with a 550-pound acoustic vault door. The front baffle wall, LCR speakers, front subs, and stands weigh over 4000 pounds. A true spectacle.

**Environmental Lights:** Environmental Lights gives dealers a variety of choices when it comes to accent lighting, including the recent additions of its Cove Wash – Dual Bend product family and its Eluxtra LED accent lighting products.

**Epson:** Epson turned many heads at CEDIA Expo with its new projector lineups, including the Q-Series 4K 3LCD laser projectors. Epson also showed its EpiqVision Mini family of smart portable laser projectors that deliver big-screen viewing for streaming and gaming, whether at home or outdoors.

**Fortress:** To accommodate requests for contemporary, low-back styles, Fortress introduced at CEDIA three new models. With its sleek and sophisticated design, the CineMilano blends into any home theater environment, while its ergonomic construction ensures optimal support for hours of viewing pleasure. Standard features include motorized recline, motorized articulating headrest, stainless steel switch with USB, and more. The San Clemente and Langley are the latest low-back contemporary designs that complement the other furniture in a family room environment yet easily convert to a theater chair. With the flick of a switch, the motorized back adjusts providing you with excellent head support.

**Furrrion:** Furrrion, a Lippert brand, is a leading innovator in outdoor entertainment systems. This year, Furrrion expanded its portfolio with the 55-, 65-, and 75-inch Aurora Full-Sun Pro Series outdoor TVs, specifically designed for direct sun exposure and ensuring vibrant viewing even in bright conditions. Additionally, the new Lumina solar-powered retractable awning has advanced Furrrion's footprint in residential awnings, bringing energy efficiency and comfort to homes and businesses. These products earned Furrrion a Best of Show win at the 2024 CEDIA Expo.





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**Grimani Systems:** Grimani Systems had a busy summer, introducing the CinemaFive Ensemble, the Psi v3 Subwoofer, and the Reflectance System, which is a center-channel speaker system for large video displays that works by reflecting sound waves off the screen to create a virtual center-channel image.

**Harman Luxury Audio:** Harman Luxury Audio is set to elevate audio experiences even further in 2025, following a successful year. 2024 highlights include the launch of the JBL Modern Audio (MA) AV Receivers and Stage 2 loudspeakers, delivering a streamlined, high-performance home theater solution designed for the next generation of music and movie lovers. In the coming year, dealers can look forward to the official release of ARCAM's Radia Series of streaming devices and the new JBL Synthesis SMA amplifiers. Additionally, expect exciting new offerings from Mark Levinson, JBL, JBL Synthesis, and Revel, ensuring Harman remains a leader in premium audio.

**Home Technology Association:** The Home Technology Association (HTA) continues serving as a bridge between integrators and the design and build communities. One example in 2024 was getting the HTA's Project Technology Assessment form listed as a resource on the NAHB's (National Association of Home Builders with over 140K members) website and new educational articles referencing the HTA's technology budgeting tool. Also, the HTA expanded the HTA Certification to include integrators in the United Kingdom. The HTA looks forward to officially launching the HTA Technology Partner program in 2025 for the design and build trades. It is designed to create greater awareness of the need for early technology planning.

**HTSA:** The buying group has gone all-in on its commitment to training members with the addition of Steven Rissi as director of technical education and development. In his new role, Rissi has leadership responsibilities in the creation, implementation, and continuous improvement of HTSA's technical training and technical professional and workforce development programs.

**Hunter Douglas:** In 2024 Hunter Douglas celebrated several key milestones starting with the fifth anniversary of its Custom Integrator Program, which has had a nearly 20-fold membership increase and introduced expanded member benefits. Hunter Douglas continued to build on its commitment to energy efficiency: Over 300 PowerView products earned AERC certifications and the brand introduced a new Solar Charger Kit that provides the option to keep shades reliably powered through low-light energy harvesting. Finally, Hunter Douglas unveiled a long-awaited addition to the PowerView line, Motorized Drapery Hardware, unifying control across all PowerView window treatments with sophistication and ease.

**Integration Controls:** 2025 brings a new technology design center with an adjusted business model to Integration Controls. In its new facility, the company will showcase traditional integration systems like distributed music, media rooms, controls, and more — as well as lighting design services, individually

addressable lighting fixtures, linear lighting, and acoustical solutions through experiential demonstrations and educational seminars. Here, clients and design-build professionals can experience varying levels of integration that suit a multitude of homeowner needs. These levels of technology allow for dreaming big while prioritizing client interests after experiencing a variety of options.

**Jetbuilt:** At CEDIA Expo, Jetbuilt introduced the industry to the JetBot AI-driven service desk. This new feature, integrated with Jetbuilt's existing Service module, is designed to simplify device troubleshooting for end users and significantly reduce service calls and on-site deployment for integrators.

**Josh.ai:** 2024 was Josh.ai's most successful year yet, accelerating the company's growth as a leading control platform going into 2025. The launch of the industry's first AI-powered operating system, AI OS, won CEDIA's Smart Home Award for Best New Software thanks to its suite of innovative and intelligent features. Josh Touchscreen started shipping at CEDIA Expo, equipping dealers with a custom room-specific control interface accessible via touch, text, and voice commands. Lastly, Josh Edge will be arriving soon to fulfill the needs of customers seeking a simple hard-button remote for TV navigation and convenient whole-home control.

**Just Add Power:** Just Add Power continues to deliver high-quality, feature-rich AV-over-IP devices that make it easy to create flexible, scalable signal distribution systems. In recognition of its years of innovation, the company's 2G+4+ Tiling Transmitter was inducted into the CEDIA Product Hall of Fame this past September, making it the third product from Just Add Power to be inducted. The company has recently produced an overwhelming run of award-winning expansions to the MaxColor product line. The 4K60 Series took home product and best-of-show honors at ISE, InfoComm, and CEDIA in 2022, 2023, and 2024. The MaxColor line supports 4K60 4:4:4 from source to screen, simplifying AV-over-IP deployments that optimize the latest 4K sources, displays, and formats. The company plans to keep the momentum going in 2025, introducing more new products to the MaxColor lineup.

**Just Video Walls:** Just Video Walls put its money where its mouth is with its new brand, Lunar Walls, where dealers will help the company set margins and price points, and validate the go-to-market strategy for the brand. The Lunar Walls line of products includes the Ledge, a pre-packaged video wall TV, and the Expanse, pre-engineered video walls that bridge the gap between custom and tailor fit.

**JVC:** JVC's exclusive D-ILA projection technology offers superior resolution, exceptional contrast, and a wide color gamut. In 2024, JVC introduced a lineup of all-new D-ILA projector models with a Blu-Escent Laser light source, deeper blacks, richer colors, and a fully motorized lens for easy installation. All models feature advanced technology including Gen 2 Frame Adapt HDR Auto Tone Mapping, Filmmaker Mode, Deep Black Tone Control, and Vivid Picture Mode.

**Kaleidescape:** 2024 was another banner year for Kaleidescape. This spring, Kaleidescape announced its expansion into the commercial cinema market as an alternative content delivery platform to bring library releases to theatres. In the summer, Kaleidescape introduced Strato V, the next generation of movie player technology. Providing stunning 4K Dolby Vision playback with lossless audio, Strato V works on its own or as part of a larger Kaleidescape system. Kaleidescape also recently announced the Terra Prime 123TB SSD movie server, providing enough storage for 2000 Kaleidescape high-bitrate 4K movies.

**KEF:** The successor to KEF's renowned Hi-Fi speaker range, the Q Series, has evolved once more in its ninth iteration since 1991. Now incorporating the Metamaterial Absorption Technology (MAT) and a suite of innovative acoustic technology derived from its flagship Hi-Fi speakers, high-fidelity sound is more accessible than ever. Leveraging the latest 12th-generation Uni-Q driver array and cutting-edge analysis techniques, the Q Series has been carefully fine-tuned. This includes a crossover redesign that refines the signal path response for a more natural, detailed sound. The result is a comprehensive lineup of eight



speakers that can be easily tailored to your space and desired setup.

**KMB Communications:** Providing manufacturers, integrators, rep firms, distributors, associations, and individuals with PR, marketing communications, content creation, copywriting, brand strategy, and more, KMB Communications continues to grow and evolve to suit the needs of brands of all sizes in the highly specialized fields of residential tech and pro AV.

**Kordz:** Kordz garnered significant recognition in 2024 for its connectivity products designed by integrators for integrators, including the SlimCat cabling line and enviro-friendly packaging solution, BeltPak, while expanding its popular Termination Challenge to more events than ever. Kordz managing director James Chen, a CEDIA Fellow and Board Member, played a pivotal role in lobbying Capitol Hill for legislation to classify system integration as a regulated industry in the USA. Kordz continued to provide thought leadership about the importance and characteristics of quality cabling through insightful articles and podcasts. Sustainability was a key focus in 2024, with the team using its “Kordzification” process to design and engineer more eco- and user-friendly packaging alternatives, innovative connectivity solutions, and efficient manufacturing practices.

**L-Acoustics:** In September, L-Acoustics introduced HYRISS (Hyperreal Immersive Sound Space), which enables complete control of the sonic environment, from creating serene atmospheres for relaxation to transforming spaces into dynamic entertainment venues. It eliminates the need for dedicated media rooms by allowing a single space to become a concert hall, sports stadium, or cinema. It does this by leveraging three core L-Acoustics technologies: L-ISA, which positions instruments in space, mimicking live concert settings; Ambiance, which uses sensing microphones and the L-ISA Processor II to transform room acoustics; and Anima, which utilizes advanced algorithms and

machine learning to localize, spatialize, separate, and immerse audio content beyond its original design.

**LEA Professional:** LEA Professional has appointed Dan Augsburger as residential sales and business development manager to lead growth in the connected home, multi-room, and whole home audio market. Committed to meeting customer needs, the company features a lineup of new products designed to enhance both integrator and end-user experiences, including the IoT-enabled Connect Series Half-Rack smart amplifier and the Connect Series Touch wall controller. With a robust technology portfolio that includes intelligent IT solutions, best-in-class DSP, and smart power management, LEA is primed for significant expansion in 2025.

**Legrand | AV:** What does a comprehensive solutions manufacturer look like? It looks like Legrand | AV. The company has brought together all its brands — C2G, Chief, Da-Lite, Luxul, Middle Atlantic Products, On-Q, SANUS, and Vaddio, as well as Vantage lighting control — to ensure integrators have everything they need with solutions that are not only flexible but fit together seamlessly. This means installers have less work to create an AV system capable of delivering amazing AV experiences and can take advantage of opportunities, whether in residential or trending applications such as resimercial, multi-dwelling unit environments, or advanced lighting control.

**Leon Speakers:** A family-owned and operated company, Leon has been designing and building products in Ann Arbor, Mich., since 1997. Since the release of its popular Horizon custom-fit soundbar, Leon has expanded its offerings to include a full suite of speakers and TV frames emphasizing artistry, design, and American craftsmanship. Leon's Edge Flex Frame offers a quick, stylish, and accessible way to frame any ultra-thin TV.

**OSD**

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**LG:** LG continues to provide the market with a variety of OLED televisions, projectors, and soundbars. It recently introduced a Business Innovation Center in its N.J. headquarters — a few floors up from its residential demo space — to help integrators experience its commercial products.

**Lenbrook:** Lenbrook's BluOS, now more than 10 years old, is a well-evolved platform whose algorithms are constantly being refined for multi-zone synchronization to keep it running smoothly. When using BluOS, everything will play at high quality and in perfect time alignment — even when streaming hi-res audio content to multiple zones. BluOS is capable of supporting up to 60 zones on a single network.

**Loxx Boxx:** Loxx Boxx continues to revolutionize package security with significant updates to its mobile app and new Defender Protection Plans. With a focus on enhancing customer experiences, the company introduced a redesigned app that enables email integration and voice assistant support, making delivery tracking seamless. The launch of the Defender LTE and Wi-Fi plans provided advanced theft prevention, while the Safe Receipt Guarantee offered peace of mind with financial coverage for stolen packages. With these innovations, Loxx Boxx reinforced its position as the go-to solution for securing home deliveries, solidifying its role in combating rising package theft.

**Lutron:** Lutron created much excitement in 2024. In May, it introduced the Ketra D2 and Rania D2 architectural downlights, which made them available in a smaller form factor than ever — a new 2-inch aperture downlight. Then in October, it brought out the Triathlon Select roller shades, which makes entry into the shading category easier for integrators with its fixed pricing structure, simplified design decisions, and a “goofproof” measuring tool.

**Luxman:** In 2025, Luxman will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Founded in 1925, Luxman dates from the dawn of radio broadcasting and stands as one of the world's oldest consumer electronics companies. The company recently completed the introduction of its Z series of integrated amplifiers with the addition of the L-505Z. Stay tuned in early 2025 for additional announcements on forthcoming limited edition models as Luxman celebrates this milestone.

**Luxul:** This year, Luxul introduced the Wi-Fi 6 AX3600 4x4 Dual-Band Indoor Access Point, which utilizes advanced Wi-Fi 6 technology for faster speeds and greater device capacity in residential and commercial networks. Additionally, it launched updated SW Series Managed PoE+ AV switches, featuring a refreshed user interface that simplifies installation and management for AV-over-IP environments. These switches offer robust PoE+ support and reliability, reinforcing Luxul's commitment to empowering integrators with exceptional networking solutions and outstanding customer support.

**Luxury Integrated Technologies:** Luxury Integrated Technologies experienced significant growth in 2024. Over 15 brands have joined LIT, as well as new teammates and partner firms. LIT continues to pave the way for the adoption of technology early in design with success in design-build collaborations. LIT is looking to expand its team while continuing its mission in the southeast.

**madVR Labs:** madVR already has many fans in the CI space, but it got plenty more with the release of the Envy Core, which is half the size, half the weight,

and half the price of the popular Envy Pro MK2. The Envy Core makes madVR Envy processing accessible to a broader audience.

**MAG THEATRON:** MAG Theatron, a Ukrainian brand known for its home theater acoustics, has made a powerful debut in the American market. By leveraging its expertise as a leader in commercial cinema sound and transferring it to the home environment, MAG Theatron has introduced an alternative to conventional Hi-Fi systems typically adapted for multichannel use. The high-energy and dynamic performance of MAG's professional-grade speakers, exceptional sound detailing, cutting-edge technological solutions, and intelligent control of sound directivity create an unparalleled audio experience that sparks conversations across forums and podcasts.

**Magnetar:** As a pioneer in high-end universal media players, Magnetar is redefining home entertainment for audiophiles and cinephiles. Magnetar has picked up where Oppo left off and seized the market opportunity, offering reference-level performance universal media players with its UDP800 and UDP900 players, which support 4K UHD, SACD, Blu-ray, and so much more. Customers with vast physical media collections have found their ideal solution with products that prioritize long-term reliability and exceptional audio-visual quality.

**McIntosh:** McIntosh celebrated its 75th anniversary this year with a stream of new products that started in January with the MC2.1KW monoblock power amplifier, which, at 2000 watts is one of the brand's most powerful amps to date. Most recently, the company launched the PS1K subwoofer that includes dual 13-inch woofers that are driven by two 500-watt Class D amplifiers, combining for 1000 watts of output.

**Middle Atlantic Products:** Middle Atlantic continues to be what great systems are built on. This past year, the company continued to showcase its RackLink remote power management system, available with its Premium+ PDU, Select Series PDU, and NEXSYS AV power backup. The newest feature is RackLink Cloud available on Premium+ and NEXSYS, which brings more flexibility and the same benefits of reduced truck rolls, cost savings, and optimal AV system operation for which the platform is known.

**Modern Atomics:** Launched at Expo, startup company Modern Atomics' Reaktor power distribution unit nabbed Residential Systems and TWICE Magazine Best of Show awards and CEDIA Best New Hardware Product. Reaktor is the first PDU designed solely for motorized shades, powering up to 22. Leveraging patent-pending technology, Reaktor eliminates up to 99.75% of quiescent current, saving up to 412 Kilowatt-hours yearly.

**Nexus 21:** The influence of design on technology has never been stronger, and Nexus 21 embraced this trend in 2024 by expanding its line of TV lifts and drop-down mechanisms. A standout release for the year is the L77i Drop-Down TV Lift. Inspired by the popularity of cathedral ceilings, this innovative lift allows TVs to rise and lower from behind a high-mounted, architecturally pleasing enclosure. Nexus 21's keen eye for design trends and technological innovation is evident in other 2024 introductions as well, including heavy-duty pop-up lifts for outdoor entertainment areas and integrated swivel functions for multipurpose great rooms.

**Nice:** Nice had a busy 2024, making additions to its C suite and introducing new third-party integrations to its smart home ecosystem. In October, the company released the latest version of its OS and announced significant changes to its marketing resources, including the appointment of Danielle Karr as its new marketing director.

**Oasys:** The buying group showed significant growth in its second year, with membership surpassing 300 custom integrators and the number of vendor partner programs nearly doubling. More than 200 attendees gathered for the 2024 edition of the group's annual conference, with the 2025 version taking place May 7-9 in Indianapolis.

**On-Q:** At CEDIA Expo 2024, On-Q showcased a range of innovative solutions,



Nexus 21



including its latest 15-inch Enclosure with Deep Trim designed for streamlined AV installations. This new enclosure, launching in early 2025, effectively houses the latest AV and networking gear featuring an additional 3 inches of depth compared to the current line. With positive feedback from installers for versatility in storage and ease of installation, this new enclosure is the perfect solution for any home.

**OneVision Resources:** In September, OneVision debuted its new Custom Membership Features that take the company's RMR offerings to the next level by giving integrators the ability to fine-tune the service plans offered through its subscription management engine. Available customizations include adjusting the number of plans offered to clients or modifying specific features such as guaranteed response times and hours of availability.

**Origin Acoustics:** Origin had a number of product introductions across its product lines all year long, but the ones that turned the most heads happened right at the start of the year, as the company launched a line of commercial-grade speakers and amplifiers, called Origin PRO.

**OSD:** OSD had an intense 2024 with several notable new products, including the SRT4 Gen2 multi-room music streaming device, the DAC-X-200 amplifier, and the OSD Black R43 and R43SQ small aperture in-ceiling speakers. One of the highlights of the year happened in April when OSD debuted its Nero Eclipse Series, which combines light and sound in a range of outdoor light speakers.

**Paradigm:** Paradigm and sister company Anthem have introduced a new Brand Experience Center at their headquarters in Mississauga, Ontario. This facility is a key part of the Paradigm Higher Learning (PHD) program, offering hands-on training and education for dealers and distributors. The center features demonstration rooms and dedicated training areas and is connected to a 225,000-square-foot manufacturing and R&D space that includes the world's largest private anechoic chamber for product testing. Starting in Q1 2025, the Experience Center will welcome visitors for multi-day sessions that include training, factory tours, and insights into the manufacturing process of Paradigm's speakers and electronics.

**Portal.io:** Portal's new AI Proposal Builder changes the game when it comes to building proposals. Dealers can speak the project details into Portal, upload a job walkthrough video, or just type up the scope of work, and a proposal is built in seconds, including descriptions, areas, items, and labor. Instead of proposals in a quarter of the time, dealers can now build proposals in seconds.

**PowerHouse Alliance:** In July, PowerHouse Alliance announced significant growth with the opening of new locations for members KOA, AlarMax, Davis Distribution, 21st Century, and Pioneer. Additionally, PHA added Gary Usher as the new vice president of marketing & events, and it recently added CEP Distributing as its newest distributor member.

**Premiere SAV:** Though Premiere SAV opened its doors just a few years ago in Jackson, Wyo., its dedication to excellence and client-focused innovation has already led to expansion into South Florida. As a Guild Integrators Alliance member, Premiere SAV is recognized for its commitment to quality and advanced technology solutions. This rapid growth reflects the dedication of their team, the trust of their clients, and the strength of their partnerships. Inspiring with visionary lighting technology in 2025, Premiere SAV continues to transform spaces with seamless, intelligent design, expanding the possibilities in smart home and commercial environments.

**Premiere Systems:** Celebrating 30 years, Premiere Systems has redefined the technology experience from Chicago to Naples, Fla. A member of the Guild Integrators Alliance, its 30th Year in Business Event showcased a refreshed brand, symbolizing their next chapter, and honored the dedicated team and

clients who drive their success. Leading with lighting innovation in 2025, Premiere continues to push boundaries, transforming spaces through cutting-edge design and technology.

**Premium Audio Company:** The Premium Audio Company is on an upward trend, with more offerings for Onkyo, Integra, and Klipsch than ever for dealers and customers. Its technology partnership with Dirac launched the world's first soundbar with Dirac Live Room Correction built-in (Klipsch Flexus 300) and Onkyo's new TX-RZ30 AV receiver with Dirac Live Room Correction at no additional cost, a first again. Its recent collaboration with Marvel Animation and Marvel Television secured Klipsch and Onkyo as the Official Home Speaker and Home Audio System Sponsors for both "X-Men'97" and "Agatha All Along" streaming on Disney+, with more sponsorships and new product series introductions coming in 2025.

**Pro Audio Technology:** In 2024, PRO celebrated its 20th anniversary. To recognize this milestone, PRO threw a "Bubbles & Beer Bash" at CEDIA Expo where they raised a glass with industry friends and associates who have contributed to PRO's success over the past two decades. In 2024, PRO also released five new loudspeaker models with a new industrial design, giving specifiers access to high-

accuracy, high-output, and compact loudspeakers for premium portable and installed installations.

**Procella Audio:** 2025 will mark a new era for Procella Audio. With new investors and a senior management team that brings a wealth of experience in both the technology and cinema industries, Procella is launching an ambitious journey of increased growth and innovation. The company is expanding its U.S. team and its market presence in both the residential and commercial cinema markets. As part of its strategic direction, Procella Audio will be establishing a state-of-the-art production facility in Belgium. This new European facility will enhance production capabilities, improve efficiency, and support the company's expansion plans.

**Proluxe by American Lighting:** The ChromaDMX Downlight by Proluxe Lighting made its debut at CEDIA EXPO 2024. This downlight offers an unparalleled lighting experience by transforming any space with state-of-the-art COB LED RGB + 2700K + 6000K control capable of creating over 1 trillion color combinations. Proluxe has engineered the ChromaDMX Downlight with ease of installation in mind. Available with full-color tunable and tunable white Vantage LHUMAN KolorTune profiles and direct Integration with Control4 (3.3+ compatible) via Artnet Gateway, the design allows for straightforward integration into new-construction projects, minimizing the need for extensive modifications. This user-friendly approach combined with a variety of trim and trimless options makes ChromaDMX an ideal choice for both builders and designers.

**ProSource:** The buying group expanded its presence with the launch of a new podcast series in March called "What's Up ProSource." The podcast features interviews with ProSource members and vendor partners and features industry insights.

**Quantum Media Systems:** Quantum Media Systems continued to redefine imaging excellence with a series of advancements in 2024. A standout achievement was the enhancement of its XDR Pro Cinema Video Wall to support the Digital Cinema Initiatives (DCI) specification. This makes Quantum Media Systems among the first to bring DCI compliance to the residential market, enabling home theater enthusiasts to enjoy first-run Hollywood films via the exclusive Bel-Air Circuit streaming service. In addition to the continued evolution of its LED video wall, Quantum also expanded into the commercial cinema sector, launching new branding, initiatives, and strategic alliances with some of the most influential filmmakers in Hollywood.



**RoseWater Energy:** In 2024, RoseWater Energy reinforced its reputation as a leading voice and top presenter at key trade shows like Lightapalooza. Through strategic outreach, RoseWater engaged the industry with insights on full-scale power management solutions vital for home electronics' performance and longevity. Committed to ongoing education, RoseWater also expanded its CEU offerings through the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and IDCEC (Interior Design Continuing Education Council), equipping professionals to deliver essential large-scale UPS and voltage regulation, surge and lightning protection, supplemental solar energy, and standby battery power to luxury homes.

**Salamander Designs:** This year, Salamander Designs advanced its entire Custom Seating Lineup with new, fresh colors, luxurious fabrics, superior comfort, and state-of-the-art features. Each seat, sectional, and ottoman is handcrafted in the USA for hours of use and backed by a Lifetime Warranty. With this, Salamander also launched an all-new, 3D Online Seating Configurator so dealers can design, configure, and quote Salamander Seating in minutes. Through partnerships with leading manufacturers, Salamander launched new Ultra-Short-Throw Projector Cabinets to support Leica, AWOL, and other video systems.

**Samsung:** Samsung's lifestyle products continue to be client-pleasers, and at CEDIA Expo it offered upgrades to top-sellers such as The Terrace, The Premiere, and The Frame. The company also had its ample 2024 TV, projector, and audio lineup on display.

**SANUS:** In October of 2024, SANUS debuted the Advanced Full-Motion 4D + SHIFT mounts. This mounting solution series solves the frustrating challenge of making small adjustments when mounting displays. With SHIFT, if a TV doesn't happen to end up in the desired position or is accidentally mismeasured during installation, it allows for easy TV height adjustment, either up or down, ensuring the TV is perfectly positioned where the homeowner wants it. The SHIFT handle can also assist with moving large TVs.

**SAV Digital Environments:** Celebrating 25 years, SAV Digital Environments honors the people who've fueled its success—a passionate team, close partnerships, and loyal clients who value innovation and trust. As a Guild Integrators Alliance member, SAV is part of a group setting the highest standards in technology integration. At their 25 Years of Innovation Event earlier this year, SAV showcased partnerships and groundbreaking solutions, including advancements in lighting for 2025 that will further transform spaces and experiences.

**Savant:** Savant continues with its focus on smart power, adding the Savant Power Storage 50 all-in-one high-performance inverter and LFP battery solution in November. The Power Storage 50 integrates with Savant's software and flexible load management technology to provide a comprehensive smart energy monitoring, management, and backup solution.

**Screen Innovations:** Screen Innovations expanded its horizons in 2024 with its Origami shades—a unique and artfully designed series that fits and covers all window layouts with style and function—and the Kaos (Kick Ass Outdoor Shades), which are built for high-wind and is Miami-Dade Hurricane Certified for use in high-velocity hurricane zones.



**Severtson Screens:** Severtson Screens saw success in 2024 with its SAT-4K and TAT-4K acoustically transparent projection screens and its 4K thin bezel fixed-frame projection screen.

**Shelly USA:** Shelly Group kicked off 2024 with the launch of its Gen3 products at CES. The new IoT devices offer more memory, compatibility, and extended functionalities. Then in June, it announced KNX compatibility—the worldwide standard for home and building automation—into its products. In July, it expanded into intelligent door locks with the acquisition of Dutch company LOQED B.V.

**Skyworth USA:** Total Access Communications recently completed a noteworthy project at Little Woodrow's in Sugarland, Texas, addressing the need for outdoor full sun TVs. Traditionally, outdoor-rated TVs required enclosures to enhance brightness and visibility. However, with Skyworth's advanced technology, this was no longer necessary. The installation involved mounting 10 75-inch Skyworth S1 Clarus Outdoor Full Sun TVs on straight towers, cemented securely to poles. These full sun outdoor TVs, exposed to full sunlight and various weather conditions, boast a brightness of 3000 nits, ensuring clear visibility across the outdoor bar even on the sunniest days. Moreover, these installations are designed to withstand extreme weather conditions, including hurricanes. The IP66 rating of the outdoor full sun TVs ensures they are resistant to water and wind, maintaining their performance and durability regardless of the elements.

**Slayman Design Associates/Slayman Cinema:** Specializing in designing luxury interiors for optimal AV enjoyment, Lisa Slayman ASID, IIDA keeps a close pulse of trending technologies and consumer demands. Her designs are continually evolving to stay abreast of emerging multimedia experiences such, such as interactive gaming and simulators to engage in E-sports. Unique in the design market, she works collaboratively with AV Integrators to create high-performance spaces that are aesthetically stunning and comfortable as they are immersive and enjoyable. She strives for a pleasing compromise that benefits all project stakeholders: integrators, architects, builders, acousticians, and end-users. Slayman has designed and created a Textile Collection for residential, hospitality, and commercial interiors that is available in showrooms and representatives across the U.S. for the design trade.

**Sol-Lux:** Sol-Lux, a division of Carefree of Colorado, entered the CEDIA channel in 2024 at CEDIA Expo, bringing over 50 years of engineering and manufacturing excellence in premium outdoor shading solutions. At launch, Sol-Lux introduced its intelligent patio and autonomous window awnings, crafted in the USA with a four-week lead time and offering strong margins for dealers. To support its nationwide dealer network, Sol-Lux appointed a dedicated national sales program manager and is expanding with strategic manufacturer representative partnerships. Utilizing Somfy and Bond for seamless integration, Sol-Lux plans to introduce motorized drop screen solutions in 2025 and will soon launch an online configurator to streamline quoting and ordering.

**Somfy:** In August, one year after launching the smallest PoE motor on the market (the Sonesse 30 PoE motor), Somfy announced the Sonesse 40 PoE motor range, which is a customizable solution for larger-sized applications. Sonesse 40 PoE motors provide a full range of options, available in three sizes—2, 4, and 6Nm—to operate even the largest of applications.

**Sonance:** At CEDIA Expo, Sonance and James drew crowds to their booth with the introduction of a number of new products, including additions to the James SPL Soundbar Series, the Small Aperture Series, and its Visual Experience Series. The company also launched its Mariner MX surface-mounted outdoor speakers over the summer.

**Sonos:** Sonos has solidified its presence in the light commercial installation market with the Era 100 Pro, its first integrated solution for professional AV installers. Featuring Power over Ethernet (PoE+), the Era 100 Pro offers a wired-

first connection, enhanced safety features, and a Surface Mount that allows flexible installation options. Sonos also recently introduced its Sound Motion technology in its newest flagship soundbar, Arc Ultra, delivering greater bass from a smaller footprint. These next-generation solutions combine Sonos' signature quality with advanced tech, providing pro AV integrators a powerful choice for custom-designed home theaters.

**Sonus faber:** The high-end audio manufacturer released the Concertino G4 two-way passive high-end loudspeaker in July. It is the fourth edition of the brand's Concertino speaker, which celebrated its 30th anniversary from the first Concertino introduction this year.

**Sony:** Attendees flocked to Sony's CEDIA Expo booth to catch a glimpse of its new BRAVIA Projector 9 and BRAVIA Projector 8 in action. Both models have upgraded brightness over their predecessors with 3400 and 2700 lumens, respectively, and they each include the new XR Processor for Projector, which has been adapted from Sony's flagship TV lineup.

**Stealth Acoustics:** After celebrating its 20th anniversary, completing an expansion of its Washington State headquarters/production facility, and bringing all injection molding in-house in 2023, Stealth Acoustics was poised for an incredible 2024. And an incredible 2024 it was! Stealth launched the completely re-designed and improved 8th generation of its LineaResponse invisible speakers, rebranded as LineaRadiance. For 2025, Stealth will update all remaining speaker models into the LineaRadiance line and add new models. Additionally, the Stealth Patio Theater (SPT) outdoor TV systems saw incredible growth in 2024, and a wealth of updates and improvements are planned for SPT in 2025.

**StormAudio:** StormAudio's Immersive Sound Receiver Fusion 20 20-channel processor continued to captivate the industry in 2024. The receiver showcases low levels of noise and distortion, delivering 150 watts (8-ohm) per channel and 500 watts (8-ohm) when bridged. This receiver has the DSP power to decode all the latest immersive formats up to 11.1.8 (Auro-3D, Dolby Atmos, DTS:X Pro, and IMAX Enhanced), and enable post-processing to optimize any speaker to any room straight out of the box.

**SVS:** SVS is invigorating the high-performance audio space through a fusion of sonic performance and design value combined with noteworthy energy built from social media, live events, owner benefits, and more. Product development for the Youngstown, Ohio-based home audio brand has remained prolific with new flagship Ultra Evolution speakers and 17-Ultra R|Evolution subwoofers both launched in the last eight months. New audio categories are on the horizon for SVS in 2025.

**Theory Audio Design:** Theory continued to build out its high-performing family of products in 2024 with the introduction of all-weather speakers and a line of Dante and AES67-enabled loudspeaker controllers. Theory continues to change people's perception of what is possible from architectural and surface-mount loudspeakers.

**Torus Power:** Torus Power has consistently reinforced its reputation among AV integrators, designers, recording studios, and other professionals at various trade shows, conferences, and training events throughout the year. The increasing interest in Torus Power's toroidal isolation transformers was evident at CEDIA Expo 2024, where many exhibitors relied on Torus Power solutions to ensure the optimal performance of systems showcased at their booths and among systems integrators nationwide who chose Torus Power to deliver exceptional AV demos at their showrooms.

**Trinnov Audio:** Trinnov Audio achieved a major audio technology milestone in 2024: the public release of WaveForming. After years of development, this

revolutionary room optimization technology is now available via a free software upgrade on the Altitude line of processors. This breakthrough eliminates room modes and achieves unparalleled bass uniformity across entire listening areas, even in challenging spaces. WaveForming is now available to professionals and enthusiasts alike. In 2025, Trinnov will continue to push boundaries in active acoustics with a new R&D facility at their Paris headquarters.

**URC:** URC had another busy year of multiple product introductions and integration announcements, but it was July's launch of its new Virtual Assistant powered by AI on URC's public website that stood out among the other innovations. This tool complements URC's Virtual Assistant on its Dealer Portal and permits 24/7 communication surrounding URC's Total Control and Complete Control product lines and enables consumers to find a certified URC dealer.

**Vaddio:** In 2024, Vaddio expanded its professional video conferencing portfolio with its new Vaddio Venture VideoBAR. The all-in-one 4K video conferencing system provides lifelike video and superior audio quality with its UHD 8.51-megapixel 1/2.5-type CMOS image sensor, a 110-degree wide-angle horizontal field of view, 5x digital zoom, six-element beamforming microphone array, and

high-fidelity speaker system with built-in DSP.

**Vanco International:** In 2024, Vanco released two new audio extenders: the PAEXEARC ARC/eARC extender with an S/PDIF failsafe and the PAEXWIR wireless 2.1 channel audio extender. They also shipped the EVEX42MV Matrix with Multiview, a versatile matrix switch with eight built-in display modes for up to four simultaneous 4K@60 Hz HDMI signals. In 2025, look for Vanco to continue innovating with next-gen AVoIP solutions, state-of-the-art audio and video distribution components, and the world's thinnest Certified Ultra High Speed HDMI cables.

**VITAL:** VITAL joined forces with Fivestone Solutions, a leading sales coaching business to launch the ELITE Sales Academy. This new program is designed to help luxury home service businesses close more sales at healthier margins — without working extra hours. The academy addresses common challenges faced by businesses in the high-end home services sector. These include struggles with closing deals, generating new revenue from existing clients, and implementing effective sales processes.

**WALL-SMART:** WALL-SMART's impact on the smart home market was undeniable in 2024, as a record number of third-party manufacturers embraced the company's flush-wall and ceiling mounts to discreetly integrate their technologies. At CEDIA Expo 2024, WALL-SMART mounts were in high demand, with many exhibitors showcasing their products using custom WALL-SMART solutions. This strong presence at the CEDIA Expo underscores the integration industry's growing interest in design-friendly technology. Over the past decade, WALL-SMART has significantly expanded its product line, now offering discreet mounting solutions for every smart home category and numerous brands, including household names like Ring and Sonos.

**Z-Wave Alliance:** The previous year was an explosive growth year for the Z-Wave Alliance. With 30+ member companies at CES 2024 and robust educational resources available, Z-Wave started the year driving smart home advancements worldwide. The Alliance solidified its leadership in smart home innovation by expanding the reach of Z-Wave Long Range (ZWLR), certifying over 65 new devices, and launching the ZWLR specification in Europe. The Alliance's commitment to cybersecurity was further demonstrated by aligning with the U.S. Cyber Trust Mark and CSA Product Security Verified programs. Additionally, the organization welcomed Nabu Casa to its Board of Directors, reinforcing open-source collaboration. **Res**





# PowerHouse Alliance:

## Bridging Vendors and Dealers with Training, Teamwork, and the New PowerCast Series

**P**owerHouse Alliance is a trusted national consortium of 10 regional distributors delivering top-tier, name-brand products to dealers and custom installers across the U.S. PowerHouse doesn't just connect vendors and dealers; it fosters a collaborative community that thrives on the power of a winning team. This partnership-focused approach sets PowerHouse apart, empowering both sides through shared goals and innovative training, including the new PowerHouse PowerCast webinar series.

### The Power of a Winning Team

In a highly competitive market, vendors and distributors can often feel at odds with each other's goals. Distributors are focused on getting products to dealers and, ultimately, to end-users. Vendors, meanwhile, aim to drive demand and hit their numbers. However, PowerHouse Alliance helps bridge this gap, reminding everyone involved that success is achieved through cooperation, not competition.

PowerHouse doesn't view these relationships as transactional; instead, they are strategic partnerships built for the long haul. Every vendor and dealer is part of a larger network that depends on mutual support and shared energy. As one team, PowerHouse, vendors, and dealers work together to deliver value to end-users, making a positive impact in the market.

With a robust lineup of over 250 brands across categories like home theater, consumer electronics, networking, security, lighting, shades and commercial AV – including leading names like Samsung, Apple, eero, and PowerShades – PowerHouse serves as a one-stop shop that meets integrators' diverse needs.

### Local Expertise with National Reach

Each PowerHouse member is deeply invested in their respective territories, bringing extensive local knowledge, hosting events, and providing 70+ warehouse locations with online ordering for easy access. These members are the go-to resource for dealers in their regions, supporting them not only with products but also with personalized guidance and market insights.

On a national scale, PowerHouse unites these regional distributors, creating a network of over 70 fully-stocked warehouse locations totaling more than 850,000 square feet. This network allows PowerHouse to deliver inventory that covers all integrator needs, ensuring quick, reliable access to top products in any category. PowerHouse's group purchasing power brings competitive pricing to dealers, helping them maintain profitability and inventory management without compromising on quality.

### PowerCast Series and Training: Building a Knowledgeable Community

The new PowerCast webinar series goes beyond traditional training by offering a deep dive into new products, industry



trends, and practical applications. This platform allows vendors and dealers to interact directly, fostering a shared understanding and addressing real-world challenges. PowerCast not only builds product knowledge but also strengthens the alignment of vendor-dealer goals, supporting both sides in hitting their targets.

For dealers, PowerCast delivers insights into industry best practices and instills confidence in their product offerings. Vendors gain valuable feedback through PowerCast, allowing them to refine their strategies based on dealer input. This knowledge-sharing model is a powerful way to build success across the industry.

### Building the Future Together

As the industry continues to evolve, the importance of strong vendor-distributor partnerships will only grow. With its commitment to teamwork, training, and innovative initiatives like PowerCast, PowerHouse Alliance is setting a new standard. By prioritizing unity and shared success, PowerHouse helps vendors and dealers navigate the modern market with confidence and efficiency, building a brighter future together.

Members of the PowerHouse Alliance are: 21st Century, Garner, NC; AlarMax, Pittsburgh, PA; CEP Distributing, Houston, TX; Davis Distribution, Newell, West Virginia; KOA Electronics Distribution, Panorama City, CA; Mountain West, Salt Lake City, UT; Pioneer Music Company, Lenexa, KS; Professional Audio Associates, Woburn, MA; Sierra Select, North Highlands, CA; and U.I. Supplies, Ramsey, NJ.

Contact Information

Dennis Holzer, Executive Director

[www.powerhousealliance.com](http://www.powerhousealliance.com)







# The Power of National Distribution with a Local Touch

**PowerHouse Alliance Members are dedicated to providing** over 250 of the top Residential & Lite Commercial AV, Home Automation, Security and Networking / IT product lines

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Pittsburgh, PA 15220  
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#### **KOA Electronics Distribution, Inc.**

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Panorama City, CA 91402  
866-606-5229  
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## TECH SHOWCASE

## SOUNDBARS

The latest models offer clients plenty of ways to upgrade their television's audio.

Whether clients are looking for a simple immersive experience or want to hear dialog clearer, soundbars have proven to be a popular solution, with manufacturers constantly bringing products to the channel. Here are some of the more recent product entries.

### Sonos Arc Ultra

The Sonos Arc Ultra soundbar uses the brand's Sound Motion transducer technology, which reduces the size of the transducer while supercharging the bass. Arc Ultra delivers up to double the bass of its predecessor, with a 9.1.4 spatial audio experience in a sleek design. Arc Ultra provides boosted bass, a spine-tingling spatial audio experience with Dolby Atmos, and advanced Speech Enhancement for even more levels of control. The all-new architecture features 14 Sonos-engineered drivers, including a Sound Motion woofer and a cluster of tweeters with waveguides on both ends to deliver a 9.1.4 spatial audio experience. Tune with Trueplay to pinpoint the best sound for your space, now available for both iOS and Android. With a new center-channel architecture, Arc Ultra maximizes vocal clarity so it's easier to follow dialog. An all-new advanced Speech Enhancement feature lets you choose your preferred level of dialog clarity in the Sonos app.



### Russound Cinema Bar 3.0

The Russound Cinema Bar 3.0 passive soundbar is designed for use with wall-mounted flat panels 65 inches and larger, boasting 100 watts RMS power handling per channel. Three full-range 4-inch drivers, three 1-inch tweeters, and three 4-inch passive radiators provide rich and room-filling audio. The Russound Cinema Bar 3.0 features a reinforced MDF body with isolated audio chambers for each channel while the satin black soundbar adds elegance and appeal beneath the television. To complement the aesthetics, the soundbar's oversized area around the speaker connectors covers any wall openings for the wiring and allows plenty of room to hide any excess when the soundbar is mounted. It mounts to any available soundbar mounting kit or TV mount, and with the included MicroSlide brackets or built-in threaded inserts, it's easy to install.



### James SPL Series

The James SPL Soundbar Series features Quadratech



tweeter technology as seen in the recent release of the new James Visual Experience Series with Quadratech. The new SPL5QT, SPL6QT, and SPL8QT soundbars are engineered to deliver an exceptional audio experience, offering crisper detail and broader sound dispersion. The integration of Quadratech tweeter technology represents a significant advancement in sound quality, providing listeners with a wider soundstage and detailed clarity that brings every note and sound effect to life. This technology was developed through iterative machine learning to optimize the driver performance for the size and surface area.

The new QT SPL models have also received a new CDX crossover design. The SPL5QT, SPL6QT, and SPL8QT models will continue to feature the built-to-order aircraft-grade aluminum construction to precision-match the dimensions and aesthetic of the specific television display per project.

### Klipsch Flexus Core 300

Klipsch has announced the next wave of its Flexus Series with the introduction of the 5.1.2-channel Flexus Core 300 – Powered by Onkyo soundbar with Dirac Live Room Correction Technology. The Flexus Core 300 sits atop the Flexus Series range, above the Core 200 and Core 100 introduced earlier this year. Offering an immersive audio experience with its Dolby Atmos and DTS:X presentation, the Core 300 features two 2.25-inch up-firing and two 2.25-inch side-firing drivers, complemented by four front-firing 2.25-inch drivers tuned by expert acousticians. With its four 4-inch built-in subwoofers, the Core 300 delivers powerful bass from a relatively small footprint. Additionally, a dedicated center channel equipped with Klipsch's horn-loaded tweeter technology delivers vocal intelligibility that guarantees clear dialog at any volume.



### TCL Q Class

The TCL Q75H is a 5.1.2 soundbar that allows users to experience Dolby Atmos and DTS:X with built-in side surround speakers. Other quality-enhancing features include built-in tweeters that deliver precise, high-frequency sound to complement the bass, a center channel speaker that ensures voices are always heard with crystal-clear clarity, up-firing Atmos





speakers for floor-to-ceiling sound, and the Ray-Danz acoustic waveguide reflectors for a super-wide soundstage.

Building on the features of Q75H, TCL's Q85H is a 7.1.4 soundbar that delivers the ultimate enveloping home theater experience by adding wireless rear speakers, which also incorporate rear Dolby Atmos up-firing drivers. With Ray-Danz, side and rear surround, and front and rear Dolby Atmos drivers, TCL's Q85H is an immersive experience, which makes it the perfect match for a TCL QD-Mini LED TV.



### Steinway Lyngdorf Model S

Steinway Lyngdorf's first Steinway & Sons soundbar, the Model S soundbar, is driven by powerful digital amplifiers, while the RoomPerfect technology calibrates it for any room and placement. The Model S soundbar offers a high-performance design with two woofers, three Air Motion Transformer tweeters, and three midrange drivers for clarity and detail, all powered by four digital amplifiers with a combined 1600 watts. The rigid and heavy enclosure is made from machined solid aluminum front and back panels, housing a low-resonance MDF frame with five acoustically separated chambers inside. The Air Motion Transformer tweeters with Kapton foil and the midrange drivers with anodized aluminum cones are powered by neodymium magnets. The left-center-right configuration allows a stable center soundstage and imaging, either in pure stereo or with center channel upmixing/multichannel downmixing in the digital Steinway & Sons processor. The two 10-inch woofers are a high-excursion design with a four-layer voice coil, an anodized aluminum cone, neodymium magnet, and an ultra-rigid cast aluminum basket. The black front is complemented by signature gold-plated tweeter frames and bronze-gold lacquered sides with black strings, resembling the piano and musical instruments.



### 2024 Sony Soundbar Lineup

Sony BRAVIA Theater Bar 8, BRAVIA Theater Bar 9 (reviewed on p. 30), and BRAVIA Theater Quad all support Dolby Atmos, DTS:X, IMAX Enhanced, Sony 360RA, and Hi-Res audio playback, and feature Acoustic Center Sync with compatible Sony displays. The Bar 8 features 11 speakers and has 30% smaller volume compared to the HT-A5000. The Bar 9 features 13 newly designed drivers,

including newly added side channel speakers. The new driver design results in a 36% smaller cabinet compared to the HT-A7000.

The four-speaker Quad system replaces the HT-A9 and features 16 total drivers (four per speaker, including tweeter, mid, woofer, and upfiring), using Sony's 360 Spatial Sound Mapping to create 16 phantom channels, virtually placing speakers around the room. Compared to the HT-A9, the Quad has a much thinner design, which is more optimal for wall mounting.

The Bars and Quad also feature Sony's new Voice Zoom 3, which uses AI to extract just voices to raise (or lower) for clearer dialog intelligibility. Powered by Sony's sound separation AI technology, Voice Zoom 3 identifies and isolates dialog that can then be adjusted, making it easier to hear voices without affecting other sounds.

### PhaseTech VSL



PhaseTech's custom-length and color Variable Length Soundbars (VLS) — VLS70-LCR for TVs 60 to 70 inches and VLS100-LCR for TVs 75 to 100 inches — are made-to-order, 3-channel soundbars that are specially crafted to serve as left, center, and right channels, using three separate speakers in a complete surround system while aesthetically matching the video display width and color. Both the speaker and matching grille are customized to the specific television model provided by the ordering integrator. The VLS soundbar mounts to a TV bracket or directly to the wall. The VLS70-LCR and VLS100-LCR are now available globally and made to order based on the TV size and brand, typically shipping within a few days of ordering. For an optimal sound experience, PhaseTech recommends pairing them with the P3-35 3-Channel Dolby Digital Amplifier.

### LG S95TR

At the forefront of LG's soundbar lineup is the premium S95TR model, delivering 810 watts and creating surround sound through its 15 channels. The S95TR boasts five up-firing channels, including the industry's first center up-firing speaker. Moreover, the angle of the center up-firing speaker ensures a seamless audio-visual experience with precise elevation to the TV screen's level.

The S95TR features improved tweeters for clear and precise audio, while also incorporating a passive radiator to enrich bass sounds and optimize the overall balance between the soundbar and the subwoofer. Notably, viewing quality is further strengthened in the S95TR, which was designed with a matte color palette, materials, and finish to effectively reduce reflections.

When paired with WOW Orchestra, the soundbar and LG TV harness the full potential of their audio channels. LG's soundbars deliver the superior quality of Dolby Atmos, driven by the advanced technology of DTS:X. WOWCAST takes audio excellence a step further, allowing the S95TR to connect wirelessly to LG TVs, ensuring superior sound without any compromise, even when playing Dolby Atmos audio. [Res](#)





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THE **INTEGRATION** GUIDE TO

**BUYING GROUPS**

The HTSA team at the fall summit gathers around executive director Jon Robbins (center).

# THE WORLD ACCORDING TO BUYING GROUPS

How these influential organizations keep their members in the know.

By Karen Mitchell

**B**uying groups have a handle on the industry like nobody else. As the vital link between vendors and integration partners, buying group execs are consistently striving to strengthen the ties.

“HTSA has always believed that shared goals across our members and vendors lead to mutual success and greater customer satisfaction, enhancing the technology industry’s success, sales, and reputation in the long term,” says Jon Robbins, executive director, HTSA. “And we accelerated this collaborative approach throughout 2024.”

Since entering the lighting and fixture category in 2017, HTSA has partnered with vendors to bring new, innovative business models and products to members, he adds. “This year, we proudly sponsored Lightapalooza’s third event, which saw major growth. With other buying groups, we’ll be a part of the fourth Lightapalooza in January 2025 in Dallas.”

In 2024, HTSA expanded member education by hosting nearly 20 major industry events, including a three-year partnership with CEDIA for more accessible training at their headquarters. Forward-thinking topics ranged from generative AI to lighting design. The group also added a compelling new National CEU Summit Program, in which integrators held more than 20 events across the country, benefiting HTSA itself, vendors, and design-build partners.

“In October, we took another important step toward unifying, as we hired Steven Rissi,” Robbins says. “Steven brings a 20-plus year extensive background in technical instruction to help us further expand our leadership in all facets of members’ educational and workforce needs. HTSA’s Fall Conference emphasized ‘fusion,’ the synergy of members and vendors working together to achieve greater success. In 2025, we’ll continue fostering this unity, increasing communication, adding new opportunities, and driving customer satisfaction.”





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Oasys recently implemented several key initiatives to deepen its connection with its members and partners. “One major area of focus has been enhancing training and education,” says Oasys director Hank Alexander. “We’re launching a comprehensive training platform that provides ongoing technical certifications, product knowledge, and leadership development.”

The group has also established dedicated forums and smaller peer groups where members can connect, share insights, and problem-solve together. “This creates a sense of community and a space for ongoing learning beyond traditional meetings or events,” says Alexander. “We understand that each member is unique, so we’ve expanded our team to offer more one-on-one advisory services, assisting members with specific challenges and helping them leverage group resources and partnerships to their fullest potential.”

At Azione Unlimited, executive director Patrick McCarthy says the commitment to education and relationship building has led to an expansion of support across multiple layers within each dealer’s organization. “One of our key initiatives is the Leadership Symposiums, a unique offering held three times a year,” he says. “These tailored, two-day sessions focus on various roles: sales, lead techs, operations, marketing, and emerging leaders. These symposiums are located at top vendor facilities like Lowell, Sonance, and Leon Speakers, fostering valuable one-on-one connections and enabling our dealers to build lasting networks and learn from leading vendors.”

Furthermore, he continues, “We’re thrilled to introduce our Education Portal, a comprehensive resource that extends well beyond product knowledge. This portal is vital to our commitment to supporting comprehensive business development. It emphasizes areas like business acumen, thought leadership, strategic planning, and operational excellence, reflecting our belief that impactful education addresses all aspects of running a thriving business.”

“We’re also utilizing the resources of our parent company, Nationwide Marketing Group,” McCarthy adds, “to offer dealers additional services, including insurance packages, warranty options, competitive credit card rates, and fleet deals. These offerings enhance our members’ ability to streamline operations and boost their bottom line, making our value proposition even stronger for dealer members.”

### NOW TRENDING

“One of the most compelling trends we’re seeing is a strong shift toward energy solutions,” McCarthy says. “Our recent addition of World4Solar, specializing in freestanding solar structures, along with innovative offerings from trusted partners like Savant, is meeting increasing demand from clients interested in sustainability and energy independence. This trend is not just a passing phase but a significant shift that positions our members to cater to clients’ evolving needs in a way that extends beyond traditional AV integration.”

“Interestingly, many of our dealers are now even forming their own electrical companies to deliver a more comprehensive, full-service experience, providing everything from smart technology integration to energy management. This evolution speaks to the adaptability of our members and a growing preference for turnkey solutions that set them apart from the competition. We see the energy category continuing to grow as an essential and differentiating offering in the years ahead.”

“There’s a surprising and growing interest in energy management solutions, likely influenced by heightened consumer awareness around sustainability,” Alexander adds. “Dealers are requesting products that include energy monitoring, smart thermostats, and battery storage systems. The push for energy-efficient and eco-friendly installations is likely to grow as consumers prioritize sustainability.”

“Health and wellness technology has also become a standout category, with a



significant uptick in requests for circadian lighting, air-quality monitoring, and other wellness-oriented features,” he notes. “It’s a shift from purely functional installations to ones that actively enhance health and well-being, a trend we expect to strengthen.”

“Outdoor installations are still highly requested,” Alexander continues, “driven by the lasting popularity of outdoor spaces that began during the pandemic. We’re seeing interest in outdoor TVs, audio systems, and even climate-controlled setups. Dealers are looking for products that offer durability alongside high performance to accommodate these spaces. In the near term, we expect continued growth in home automation and wellness tech, with sustainability becoming a core focus across product categories. As technology and lifestyle trends evolve, we anticipate that dealers will seek adaptable, future-proof solutions that can align with these emerging consumer expectations.”

Recent HTSA data shows that lighting category adoption benefits everyone, with growth in this sector not detracting from non-lighting products or vendors. “Over the past several years, we’ve demonstrated that lighting is essential to our members’ growth, as it brings them into projects earlier — a challenge across the industry until now,” Robbins says.

“At the conference, I shared survey and sales data showing that members excelling in lighting fixture sales are driving growth across all categories,” he continues. “A design-focused project approach, with lighting at the forefront, enables our members, and therefore our vendors, to secure budgets and establish themselves as essential members of today’s home design team. These insights confirm that our goals are coming to fruition, setting our members and vendors on a strong growth trajectory that we expect to continue through 2025.”

## PIVOT AND GROW

"Our shared commitment to success drives us to overcome challenges naturally for both members and vendors," Robbins says. "This year's Fall Conference highlighted not just products and services, but also the importance of people. One of HTSA's key strengths is our keen focus on interpersonal relationships and a curriculum that promotes trust and respect. By welcoming diverse perspectives and uniting as a group, we foster resilient, long-lasting business partnerships."

Built on themes like unity and fusion, HTSA has navigated significant challenges over recent years. "During the pandemic, while supply chains were tested, we maintained close coordination between members and vendors, adapting to obstacles as they arose," he adds. "As ultra-high sales trends softened, our collaborative approach enabled us to thrive in uncertain times, pooling our knowledge and strengthening our teamwork. Looking to 2025, HTSA members can look forward to an expanded lineup of progressive events. In addition to Lightapalooza, our conferences, and project managers' summits, we're adding technical training led by Steve Rissi, along with enhanced AI summits and all-new summits tailored to the latest member needs. Our Fall Conference reflects more than just a theme of fusion; we're living it. Together, we continue to shape the future of our industry, leading rather than simply responding to change."

Oasys has gained valuable insights over the past year that have shaped its approach and offerings. "As dealers navigate a wide range of client needs, they require products that can scale and adapt without adding complexity," Alexander says. "Another insight has been the rising importance of sustainable and wellness-focused technology. As consumer awareness grows, we've seen a shift in demand toward energy-efficient, health-enhancing products."

"With global supply chain disruptions, ensuring consistent product availability is challenging," he notes. "We've had to diversify sourcing and build more resilient partnerships to minimize delays and keep projects on track for dealers. As we introduce new technologies, there's a learning curve. Ensuring our dealers are fully trained and confident in implementing these newer solutions has become a key focus, and we've invested heavily in training and support. These challenges reinforce our commitment to delivering adaptable, reliable solutions that empower our dealers and meet evolving market demands."

With a mature dealer network, Azione recognizes that most of its members have strong foundations in the basics. "Rather than looking for quick fixes or trendy solutions, our focus has shifted toward helping these established businesses sharpen their operations and scale effectively," McCarthy concludes. "We're dedicated to supporting members in breaking through growth plateaus by honing core skills in areas such as operational efficiency, cash flow management, productivity optimization, and recurring revenue development."

"This approach allows us to work closely with members to build enduring foundations and develop customized roadmaps that support sustainable growth. The challenge, of course, is that it requires a commitment to consistent, deliberate improvement rather than silver bullets. But by emphasizing strategic development, we're positioning our members to achieve long-term success in a constantly evolving market. [Res](#)



Azione Unlimited executive director Patrick McCarthy at the group's fall event. Photo by Colin Sway.

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**Sony**

# BRAVIA Theater Bar 9 Dolby Atmos Soundbar

**F**or years, you could count on the Consumer Electronics Show in January to be the launch site for most company's new releases. However, for reasons known only to them, Sony has stopped unveiling new products at CES — heck, they've all but stopped *showing* products at CES! — and have instead focused on talking about how they are developing tools to help and support the creator community and working with Honda on the upcoming AFEELA smart car launch.

But this hasn't stopped Sony from continuing to develop new home AV products. Earlier this year, I was among a group of journalists from around the world that was invited to visit Sony Pictures Entertainment Studios in Culver City, Calif., where the company revealed its 2024 TV and soundbar lineup.

The company's new tagline is "Cinema is coming home," reinforcing the idea that Sony most accurately delivers what the content

creator intended you to see and hear. Along with that, Sony rebranded its entire TV, soundbar, and projector lineup under the BRAVIA nameplate, with the BRAVIA 9 being the flagship offering across all lines.

With this launch, Sony's previous flagship soundbar, the HT-A7000 (review available online) has been replaced with the BRAVIA Theater Bar 9 (or HT-A9000 if you like to hang onto more traditional model numbers). We were given brief demonstrations of the new bars during the visit, so I was excited to see how this new design sounded in my home.

## First Impressions

Compared with the HT-A7000, the Bar 9 has a much cleaner and simpler aesthetic. Gone are the 7000's glossy black top flourishes and metal front grille, with the Bar 9 being entirely wrapped around the front, top, and sides with dark gray speaker fabric.

But the biggest thing you notice is that,

compared with the 7000, the Bar 9 is much smaller. Sony says that due to a new driver design, the Bar 9 has a 36% smaller cabinet volume than the 7000 — and it looks it. By the numbers, the 7000 measured 51.25 x 3.25 x 5.625 inches (WxHxD), while the new Bar 9 comes in at 51.25 x 2.625 x 4.375. However, the 7000's depth of roughly 6.25 inches when wall-mounted gives it an imposing look under a flat panel display. Combined with the Bar 9's rounded edges and new tighter wall mount, it has a softer, smaller overall look.

They say less is more, and while the Bar 9 is physically smaller, it packs in more drivers, going up from the 7000's 11 drivers to 13 in the Bar 9, with two newly added, full-range side-firing drivers, and redesigned beam tweeters for a clearer and broader soundstage.

These 13 new drivers include the two 46 x 54mm side drivers, two beam tweeters, two 45 x 90mm woofers, two front left/right 10mm soft-dome tweeters, and two up-firing 46 x

By John Sciacca

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KUDOS

Tight integration with Sony TVs; full system with sub and rears delivers immersive movie surround

## CONCERNS

Really needs the sub and surrounds; pricey compared to competition; requires BRAVIA Connect App

## PRODUCT SPECS

- 7.10.2-channel soundbar with built-in subwoofer
- 13 built-in speakers, including three tweeters, four woofers, two up-firing, two side-firing, and two beam tweeters, powered by 585 total watts and two quad passive radiators
- Decodes all major surround formats, including Dolby Atmos, DTS:X, and IMAX Enhanced, as well as hi-res audio up to 96/24 and 360 Reality Audio
- Supports Spotify Connect, Apple AirPlay2, and Bluetooth 5.2
- 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac Wi-Fi
- Setup and Sound Field Optimization require the BRAVIA Connect mobile app (iOS, Android)
- Inputs: HDMI 2.1/ HDCP 2.2 inputs (both 8K and 4K/120 capable); Outputs: HDMI 2.1/ HDCP 2.2 (8K and 4K/120, VRR, ALLM) with eARC, mini-jack S-Center Out; detachable power cord

## Dimensions and Weight:

- 51.25 x 2.625 x 4.375 inches (WxHxD); 12.3 pounds

54mm drivers, with two 45 x 90mm speakers and one 22mm tweeter dedicated to center-channel duties. For added bass, there are also four passive radiators. Each active driver is powered by its own 45 watts of digital amplification for 585 watts of total power.

But sometimes less is just *less*. Not that weight is the most telling spec, but at just 12.3 pounds, it certainly doesn't have the same luxe heft as the 19-plus pounds of the 7000. (To be

fair, that weight difference does track with the 36% reduction in cabinet volume.)

Beyond shedding size, the Bar 9 is also missing *many* of the features of the previous flagship bar, including the on-screen *and* front panel displays, a built-in subwoofer, Bluetooth audio transmitter, remote IR pass-thru, and Google Cast. Beyond that, the Bar 9 limits connectivity to just two HDMI connections: one in and one eARC out. Gone are the 7000's second HDMI input, Toslink digital audio, analog audio, mini-jack IR, RS-232, and Ethernet connections. Sony claims that 72% of soundbar consumers say that movies are their favorite content, so perhaps these connections won't be missed by most users.

Sony continues its *à la carte* approach, selling its soundbars solo while offering optional subwoofers and surround speakers to complete a full surround experience. Sony's two wireless subwoofers — the SA-SW3 and SA-SW5 — remain in the lineup, as do the SA-RS5 and SA-RS3S wireless rear speakers. For my review, I used an SA-SW5 sub and a pair of SA-RS5s for a full Dolby Atmos immersive surround system. And, spoiler, I don't think you should consider selling the system any other way.

The SW5 subwoofer is finished in a dark charcoal gray with a pebbled finish and rounded corners and edges that match the look of the Bar 9, with a grille cloth covering the front and back. The sub features a 7-inch woofer with a down-firing passive radiator powered by a 300-watt amplifier. With no buttons or controls for users to worry over, this is a set-it-and-forget-it device that will likely spend its days unobtrusively in a corner.

For surround channels, the RS5 is definitely the way to go, as it includes larger drivers and adds the up-firing element lacking in the RS3S. They also include a built-in rechargeable battery that offers up to 10 hours of playback should you need to use them in a location where power isn't nearby, or if you prefer to hide the speakers away when not in use. The RS5s echo the family look, with a curved front finished in a dark graphite fabric wrap. At just 5.75 x 9.875 x 5.375 inches (WxHxD), they are small enough to discreetly sit on a shelf, table, cabinet, or stand. The RS5 has two front-firing drivers, including a wide-directivity woofer and soft-dome tweeter, along with the same up-firing speaker found in the Bar 9, all powered by three independent amplifiers as well as dual passive radiators.



## Setup

The big decision with any soundbar installation is whether it will go on the wall or just sit on a tabletop. Sony includes L-brackets and a template for wall mounting, but also includes some small feet that can be used to raise the bar to sit above the tabletop feet of Sony's 2024 TV lineup. A big benefit of the 5/8-inch height reduction is that the Bar 9 should be able to sit in front of virtually any TV without cutting into the screen.

As mentioned, connections are straightforward, with just a single HDMI in and HDMI eARC out. These are both HDMI 2.1 and support 8K and 4K/120 resolutions, along with VRR, ALLM, and Dolby Vision. Also, if connecting a PlayStation 5, the bar supports Auto HDR Tone Mapping and Auto Genre Picture Mode.

Besides the detachable power cord — which is accessible from underneath even if the unit is wall-mounted — the Bar 9's other connection of interest for Sony TV owners is an S-Center-Out mini-jack. Should your Sony TV have a corresponding input, this simple connection via an included cable allows you to use the TV's included speakers as a kind of enhanced center-channel. Sony has upgraded this mode for 2024, calling it Acoustic Center Sync 2.0, which is said to provide an improved experience between bar and display.

Another benefit for new Sony display owners is the integrated onscreen user interface when the TV and bar are connected via eARC. Here, you can get quick onscreen access and control over key bar features within the TV's GUI for things like rear and sub volume, changing sound modes, enabling voice or night mode, and so on. Because the Bar 9 has no onscreen



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display of its own and just limited control via the “simple” 10-button remote, this provides a simple and quick way to make adjustments without needing to open the BRAVIA Connect app.

The Bar 9 offers a simple on/off Voice Mode for raising dialog, but when connected to a 2024 Sony TV, you can take advantage of Sony’s new AI-powered Voice Zoom 3 technology, which identifies and isolates dialog that can then be adjusted in  $\pm 6$  steps to raise or lower it. (One use case Sony offered for wanting to lower dialog was when watching sports and not wanting to hear the commentators.) The real benefit here is the AI’s ability to adjust voices *only* without affecting other sounds. While I didn’t have a 2024 Sony display to experience this during my demo, I did hear it during Sony’s product launch and it did an impressive job of isolating and adjusting just the dialog, which is certainly one of the biggest modern complaints surrounding TV watching. This adds another compelling benefit of pairing the Bar 9 with a current Sony display.

Beyond the physical connections, setting up a 2024 Sony BRAVIA bar requires using Sony’s new BRAVIA Connect mobile app. This in itself isn’t a big deal, but the fact that you have to set up an account with an email is the part I take issue with, as it adds another pain point during installation. But, love it or lump it, you’ll need to register and confirm an email account to fully set up and use the bar.

If you have a Sony subwoofer or surround speakers, you should connect them and power them on at this point as it will save you some steps later. The surround speakers are identified by an R or L on the bottom, and they can be wall-mounted using either a keyhook or threaded screw mount. The power connection is on the bottom of the speakers, with a nice way of dressing the wiring that doesn’t affect them sitting on a table or stand. For my install, I had them mounted at ear height to the left and right of my listening position.

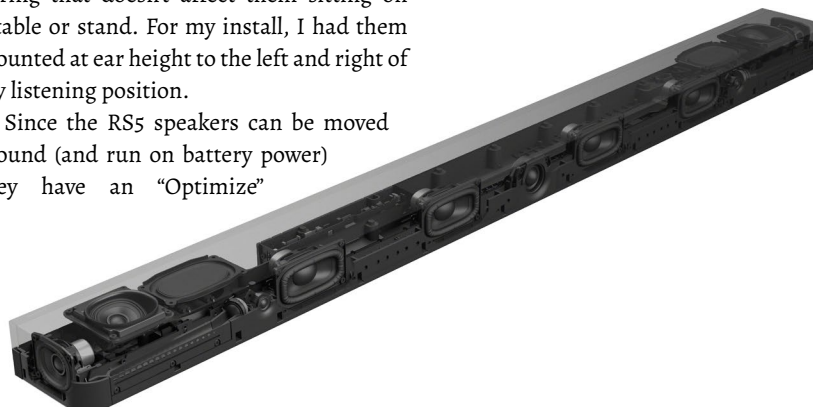
Since the RS5 speakers can be moved around (and run on battery power) they have an “Optimize”

button on top that utilizes the dual microphones in each speaker to perform a quick calibration for their location. I don’t believe this has any impact on the Bar 9’s performance, but I always ran the sound optimization from within the BRAVIA Connect app.

Once that’s done, the app walks you through pairing the bar to Wi-Fi, confirming the connection between the bar and display, and connecting any additional wireless speakers. Once that’s completed, the app prompts you to run the Sound Field Optimization, which is the other big feature of the new Bar 8 and 9 and is required to use Sony’s 360 Spatial Sound Mapping technology.

With this, you’re prompted to move to the location where you primarily sit, and the bar (and any connected speakers) will emit a series of tones to measure distance and levels using your phone’s microphone. When that’s completed, the bar will take additional measurements to calculate the room’s acoustic environment. Interestingly — read: *“surprising and disappointingly”* — it doesn’t measure the connected subwoofer during this process, the one component that generally benefits *most* from any room correction. After you’ve run the demo, you’re treated to a demo snippet of forest sounds that shows off Sony’s 360 Spatial Sound technology.

Besides not measuring the sub, there is no way to see what it did or to A/B it with the calibration on/off after the calibration is complete. Also, adjustments are limited to just rear and bass levels in a  $\pm 10$ -step range. You can’t individually adjust the levels of any speakers within the Bar 9, such as the side or width drivers, or adjust the overall height channel volume. I’m thrilled that Sony has made a step toward including room correction, and that they are actually



measuring at the listening position as opposed to using microphones inside the soundbar, but I'd like them to expand this a bit. And it's certainly possible they will expand on and improve this with future firmware updates.

### Performance

I started my review by first listening to the Bar 9 by itself for some time before adding the RS5 rear speakers and then ultimately adding the SW5 subwoofer for the full experience.

Out of the gate, I have to say I wasn't super-impressed with the Bar 9 just playing on its own. At a \$1399 retail price, I really expected this to be a banger, and, well, it was *good* but not *great*. I definitely noticed the lack of the on-board subwoofers from the HT-A7000, as bass was much less present. However, by raising the bar's bass output to "Max" in the app, it delivered much deeper output, though this occasionally produced some distortion when listening at loud volumes with content that had a lot of low end.

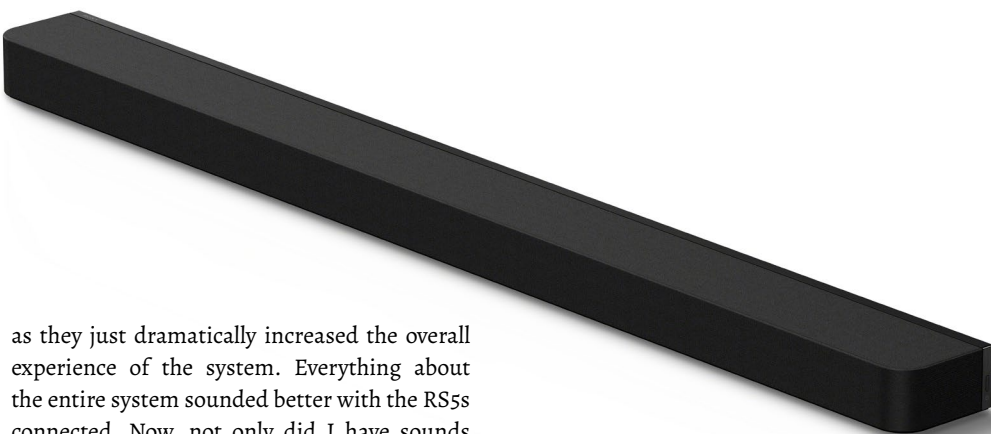
Solo, the Bar 9 does a nice job of providing a fairly wide front soundstage and giving some height effects, though it seemed like the front soundstage was higher rather than the sounds actually coming from up overhead. Ultimately, I never felt like I was experiencing "surround sound." At best, sounds would feel like they were coming outside and above the bar, but never really beside, behind, or above me.

There is a "Sound field" button in the app that, in typical Sony-speak, the manual describes as "Outputs sound with the surround sound effect. This setting can be used to experience surround sound with a sense of presence." But when turned off, it appears to play things in their native incoming format (i.e., 2-channel signals are played back in stereo), so I'm glad there is a nod to letting music listeners enjoy stereo if they desire.

With music listening, which can be streamed to the bar via Bluetooth, Spotify Connect, or Apple AirPlay 2, I felt the bar did a decent job of delivering some left/right separation, giving you a sense of how musicians are arranged.

So, while the Bar 9 on its own is a massive step up over TV-only sound in volume, presence, and dialog intelligibility, it is unlikely to wow someone expecting a theater-like experience, especially at its price.

Without question, adding the RS5 rear speakers upped the experience immensely and delivered a *true* sense of surround sound. In fact, I kept thinking of the phrase "force multiplier" regarding adding these speakers,



as they just dramatically increased the overall experience of the system. Everything about the entire system sounded better with the RS5s connected. Now, not only did I have sounds that were actually coming from beside/behind me, but with Sony's 360 Spatial Sound there was much better cohesion between the Bar 9 in front and the RS5s in the rear, as well as a much greater sense of both width and height.

With the RS5s connected, watching the opening of *Kong: Skull Island*, I could hear the planes crisscrossing up overhead; I could hear the buzzes and rattles and engine noises all around from *Unbroken*; and I could clearly hear the wrecking ball smashing left-to-right and Kong jumping around overhead in *Ready Player One*. Sounds were now coming from "phantom" speakers well off to my sides and around the room. Even when watching sports, the RS5s placed you way more in the experience, such as delivering crowd noise and P.A. echo during the World Series or NFL games.

Finally, I added the SW5 subwoofer, and to paraphrase Darth Vader, the circle was now complete. With the sub filling in the low end that the Bar 9 simply couldn't produce, the full 9.1.4 system working together finally produced the kind of audio I've come to expect from high-end bars, able to deliver cinematic volume levels.

Watching the *Space Station* clip from an IMAX Enhanced demo disc delivered deep, tactile bass from the shuttle's massive engines that I could feel. A DTS:X clip from *Battleship*, delivered the heavy weight of the massive anchor chains being lowered across the deck and the large ship plunging into the water, followed by the bass pummeling from the ship's massive guns delivering a broadside and the heavy explosions. Working as a team, the system delivered the immersive, room-filling, sensory experience people equate with home theater.

I'll be honest; I missed the front-panel display. The single multi-colored LED at least showed me whether the bar was on and what input was selected, with a second LED that

illuminated on receiving a volume command. With eARC, I rarely needed to use anything besides my TV remote to adjust the volume, but when I needed to check or tweak a setting, I'd jump into the BRAVIA Connect app. I do like how the incoming signal format — be it Dolby Audio, Dolby Atmos, DTS:X, or IMAX DTS:X — was clearly displayed. People want to see they are getting what they paid for, and this is presented front and center. It's also really easy to adjust rear and bass levels, engage Voice or Night modes, or select the Sound Fields between 360 Spatial Sound, Dolby Speaker Virtualizer, and DTS Neural:X, and see the battery levels of the connected RS5 speakers.

For the most part, the app worked fine, but there were multiple instances where I would open it and get a message like, "Registration for BRAVIA Theater Bar 9 has been removed from your account. To operate BRAVIA Theater Bar 9, register again." Or "Disconnected from BRAVIA Theater Bar 9." These were relatively easy to resolve, but it just goes to show why making someone link an app to an account to use a product is a potentially bad idea.

As a solo experience, I don't think the Bar 9 delivers for its \$1399 retail. Especially when you consider the Sonos Arc Ultra is \$999 and the complete, 9.1.5-channel LG S95TR package sells for \$1399. While Sony frequently offers discounts and bundle pricing, the total package retail price for the Bar 9, SA-RS5 surrounds, and SA-SW5 subwoofer is a hefty \$2597, putting it in a very premium price category. In comparison, the better-sounding (in my opinion) Samsung 11.1.4-channel HW-Q990D retails for \$1699. For someone who wants to "keep it all Sony," the Bar 9 does offer some great integration with Sony displays, but that comes at a hefty price. **Res**



# Taking the Showroom on the Road

Mobile demos go the extra mile in helping homeowners experience true outdoor living.



BY KEVIN MINTON, NATIONAL SALES MANAGER, COASTAL SOURCE

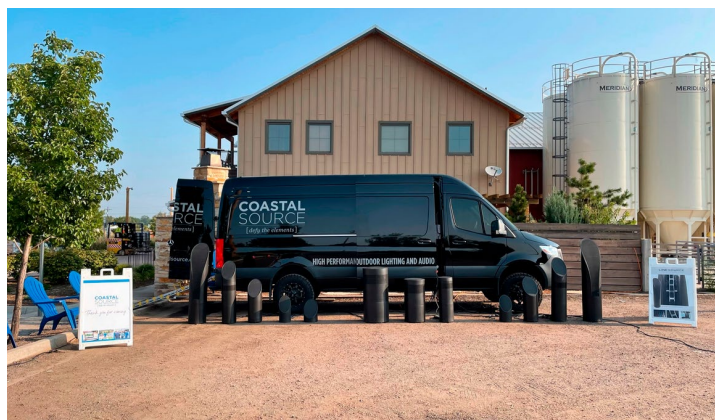
The addition of smart outdoor lighting and audio systems to a home can offer an outsized return on investment by transforming existing spaces so they can be utilized in new ways and expand the comforts of the indoors to patios, yards, and pool areas. However, it's not always easy to imagine what an installation will deliver by looking at product catalogs or even visiting an indoor showroom.

Knowing this, Coastal Source reimagined the demo process in 2018 with the launch of our first Mobile Demo Van, which uses the client's own property to showcase the full range of our products and capabilities and demonstrate how they can upgrade the aesthetics and experiences of their outdoor spaces.

Now, using a fleet of custom-built vans decked out with innovative outdoor lighting and audio products designed to defy the elements and enable resort-level outdoor entertainment spaces, we are helping integrators seal more deals by showing homeowners exactly how we can bring their outdoor dreams to life.

## The Power of Presentation

When one of our Mobile Demo Vans shows up to a potential client's home, it can be an exhilarating experience that leaves them saying "wow" out loud. By bringing the demo to them, including potentially mocking up a real installation in the actual space the homeowner intends to develop, we are able to go way beyond their expectations, build excitement, and even encourage them to consider grander designs to maximize their outdoor enjoyment. It also makes it easier and more convenient for the owners, so they don't have to schedule time away from work, sit in traffic, or rearrange family obligations, ensuring they enter the demo free of stress.



While a quality showroom can illuminate how different light fixtures perform or how different speakers sound, only this kind of customized on-site showcase can provide a direct preview of the real-world results homeowners can expect. The convenience, emotional impact, and adaptability of this tactic effectively removes the pain from the sales process and has so far resulted in an astounding 98% closing rate. In the six years since we launched the program, we have expanded to 15 vans across the United States, ensuring access to our dealers and reps to help them land more contracts.

## Designed For Success

Selling high-performance products like our premium outdoor light fixtures and speakers has always required a depth of knowledge and expertise that can impress the buyer. Because of this, we aim to provide a unique and intimate experience that is different for every home and homeowner. Rather than thumbing through a catalog or browsing options in a company-owned space, we can walk through their yard and show them exactly what their plans will produce, as well as introduce new ideas and possibilities. In the end, our customers' satisfaction comes down to how well-designed the solution is.

Are the optimal light fixtures being used to accentuate shrubbery or brighten a walking path? Are speakers located in the right spot and facing the right direction to achieve the desired listening zones? Are the components appropriately hidden or located to add to the aesthetic without introducing obstructions? And is the system easy enough to control that the owners enjoy using it on a daily basis?

When the answer to all these questions is a resounding yes, customer satisfaction is virtually guaranteed. That's why it's so valuable that our Mobile Demo Vans provide the ability to preview final results with an on-site demo that helps ensure each design lives up to the space and the needs of the owners. Making the demo process a two-way conversation allows the professionals to more easily identify necessary design changes and opportunities, such as a hot tub needing its own lights and audio zone because that's where the owners like to spend their nights. After all, no two people are alike, even if they live on very similar properties.

## Outdoor AV Takes Center Stage

For professionals and homeowners alike, bringing outdoor tech experiences straight to the home before a dollar is spent is a powerfully effective way to envision the future they want and then make it a reality. [Res](#)

For more information, visit <https://coastalsource.com>.



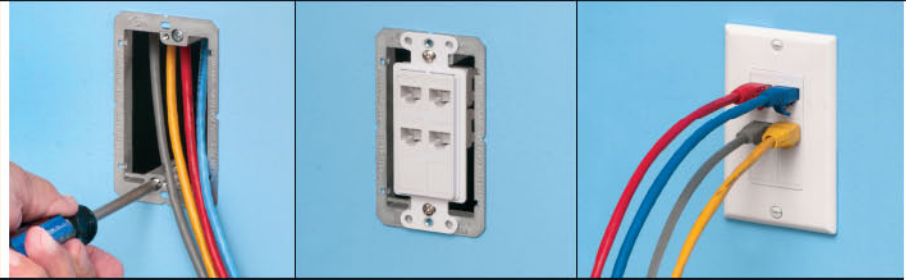
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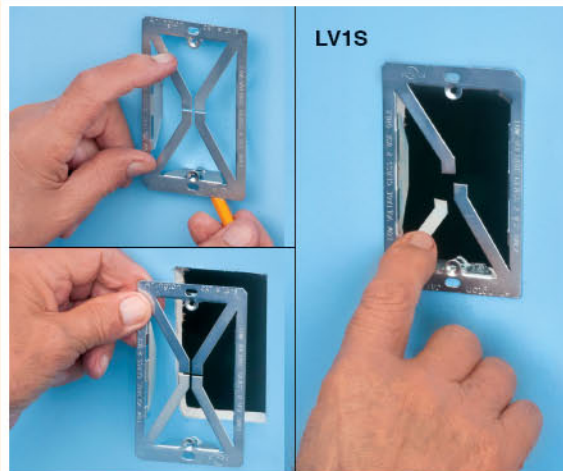
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