

The Integrator's Voice

It takes a lot of business savvy and determination for a company to remain successful after almost 80 years. But HuntingtonTV, a retail and integration firm located in Massachusetts, has done just that. The company has evolved over the years from a small tire and battery store to a booming home integration firm. What's its secret to success? A personal focus on the customer, says Larry Shulman, who currently runs HuntingtonTV.

Q. Who started HuntingtonTV? Who has managed it throughout the years?

A. Simon Shulman, grandfather of the current owner Larry Shulman, started HuntingtonTV back in 1927. The company was later taken over by Simon's son William Shulman. Today, William's son, Larry Shulman, operates and manages the company, along with his sister Aileen, who is the bookkeeper and office manager.

Q. What products and services were offered when the company first started? What services do you offer today? How were decisions made to add or delete products and services?

A. When the company first started, the name was Huntington Tire and Battery. The company primarily sold tires and batteries. Then in the 1930s, when radios took hold, Huntington Tire and Battery added car and home radios to its line of SKUs. By 1948, TV had come into Boston, and the retail company started servicing TVs and radio for \$5 or \$6. At this point, the company changed its name to Huntington Radio & TV Inc. After that, the company gradually started adding stereos, walkmans, camcorders and tape recorders as they became available.

Today, HuntingtonTV is still a retail outlet, but has added the design and installation of whole-house custom integration solutions. The decision to add these new products and services was simply a function of market needs. If HuntingtonTV stayed in the retail business only, the company would probably have dissolved, since the demands of customers have changed so much throughout the years.



Family-run retail and integration firm knows what it takes to stick around for the long haul

By Leslie Stevens

Spotlight On: Larry Shulman

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Q. How has management and positioning of the company changed over the years? How has that affected your business?

A. When HuntingtonTV first started, it was a local mom-and-pop retail store. Today, it has come to be much broader than that. However, customers can still walk into the store and get personal attention. As HuntingtonTV maintains its family-managed positioning, run from generation to generation, we know most of our customers by their first names. Ninety percent of our business is referral-based or comes from repeat customers. Today, we still offer loyal and personal attention that many retail and chain integration companies don't nowadays. Because of this stable environment, we have grown tremendously.

Q. How have you and the previous management team been marketing the company throughout the years?

A. In the early years, we primarily advertised in newspapers. We also threw parties and events in the store. Ironically, we never advertised on radio or TV.

Today, we still advertise in the newspaper and in a few professional magazines that feature home architecture. We offer lifestyle brochures to consumers, send direct mail to homeowners and, naturally, have a Web site. We still don't advertise on radio or TV. In addition, we scaled back on our in-store events because most people today are too busy to attend events as often as before. However, we might host an open house when we complete our new home theater showroom.

Q. What factors do you believe had the most impact in keeping HuntingtonTV successful throughout the years?

A. The primary reason we have been so successful for so long is the personal time and attention we give each customer.

Since the company is family run, we treat everyone with respect. No one is on commission. HuntingtonTV is a hands-on company—even family members make deliveries. The main difference is our service mix today. We don't personally fix products anymore; we outsource this. However, we still make the personal connection between the customer and repair shop. No matter what, we'll make sure that the problem is taken care of. We don't refer the customer back to the manufacturer.

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