

Learning from the Source

Homebuilders Often Have a Hard Time Keeping Up with Technology. One Solution Is to Seek out Dealers that Are Eager to Train.

by Leslie Stevens

ROI

- The best technology systems are integrated initially.
- Several dealers are eager to educate builders on technology.

As a builder, keeping up on integrated electronics solutions for new homes means you have to expand beyond your traditional industry cohorts and spend time with technology specialists. But since your schedule is often hectic and you're usually tied to your project site or place of business, learning about technology can become a daunting task. ■ Fortunately, several dealers have recognized that it's difficult for you to make your way into their showrooms, and have gone the extra mile to educate you on technology. Following are examples of three dealers who have become vital in educating local builders, architects and interior designers on the products and opportunities available with home technology. They share how they support builders and offer advice on how you can seek out learning opportunities within your market. ■ Wires and electronics are only a part of whole-house system integration. The best systems are designed and installed when initially integrated into the architecture and décor.

Homebuyers want technology to blend in with the structure and aesthetics of their home. The first example involves one interior designer and one architect who both share with you how they partner with dealers to provide the builder with a complete solution.

TRAVELING UNIVERSITY

Audio/video dealer Tom Tieney of Custom Electronics, in Falmouth, Maine, takes it on the road by offering American Institute of Architects (AIA) certified classes in remote locations. These classes are designed to help builders, architects and interior designers learn about technology. Ironically enough, classes are usually taught at the site of an architect's office, one that doesn't mind letting their competition in.

Custom Electronics partners with electronics manufacturers who actually teach the course. Each program focuses on a different subject, which is centered around

for their on-site local sales offices. Finally, when builders feel comfortable with technology, he'll advance them into the area of structured wiring and electronic upgrades.

TECHNOLOGY SPREADS TO THE COMMUNITY

Audio/video dealer, Kevin Ray of Custom Audio Video, Bluffton, S.C., educates builders, architects, interior designers, homeowners and homebuyers on technology by writing tech articles for a local magazine, which is distributed to residents and businesses. Once circulated, readers oftentimes call in with questions regarding technology. Ray sends them literature designed to help them understand what is possible in the home. One set of brochures is designed to help builders, architects and interior designers learn about seamless electronic integration. Other literature is designed for homebuyers and homeowners who want to learn more about electronic options.



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electronic options in a home. For example, Sony teaches "Design for Electronic Lifestyle," Lutron teaches the benefits of low voltage lighting, and Crestron teaches "Control by Design," a workshop about whole-house integration.

Eventually, Custom Electronics will develop their own accredited courses, enabling them to offer builders more courses in more locations. "All our classes will be AIA certified, and structured similar to the ones currently offered," says Tieney. "We spoke with the main AIA chapter to get the appropriate criteria. Our instructors already have experience teaching classes, most notably at [CEDIA Expo] and EH Expo."

TECHNOLOGY COMES TO YOUR TRADE SHOWS

Security dealer Sean Smiley of CCS Presenting Systems, in Hoffman Estates, Ill., exhibits at tradeshows in the builder market. This makes it easy for you to learn about technology without going much out of your way.

Smiley displays whole-house audio/video and video-conferencing equipment that builders typically need in their boardroom and model homes. Builders learn about projectors, plasmas, audio/video and lighting, which then makes the transition into whole-house system integration much smoother.

Smiley educates builders on technology while integrating the builder's corporate boardroom and training facilities. He then proceeds to educate them on the options available

Custom Audio Video also reaches builders by participating in an annual awards ceremony that is held for builders in Hilton Head N.C. Ray gets involved with the program by installing the electronics that are used on stage. Custom Audio Video remains available to answer any builder's questions regarding technology, questions that builders might not otherwise get around to asking.

To further promote the business of audio/video, Ray stays visible among builders through their fleet of vans. "We want builders and the community alike to know that custom installation is available from a local integrator," says Ray. "We partnered with one of our electronic suppliers, SpeakerCraft, to create decals displaying the message about distributed audio. We then decorated all of our trucks, which are seen daily by thousands of people, including builders, architects and interior designers."

ARCHITECTS AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS ADD SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

Architect John Kern of Balsamo Olson Lewis (BOL), in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., helps to educate builders and their customers on integrated home technology by including home theaters into their plans. According to Kern, "Every home we've designed in the past two years has featured a home theater. Our designers present our clients with the

■ (Left) For the ultimate home system performance, technology should be implemented during construction—creating a need for home builders to educate themselves on the latest trends.

■ (Right) Builders interested in learning about home technology are likely to find dealers willing to teach them.

option for integrated systems, and if the homeowner is interested, we will bring in a dealer. This provides a win/win situation for us, the builder, the dealer and the homebuyer."

Interior designer, Lezlie Trujillo, of Lezlie Trujillo Interior Design, in Trabuco Canyon, Calif., partners with integrators to promote the combination of an electronic lifestyle with interior design. By integrating electronics with the décor, Trujillo can provide builders a complete solution. "Oftentimes we will share a room or booth with a dealer at a consumer-oriented show," says Trujillo. "Consumers come in with their floor plans and we get them excited about speakers hidden in the walls or plasmas disguised as artwork. A lot of husbands and wives walk these shows together, so we get both of their 'buy-in' right away. This facilitates the process when working with builders."

Builders who are interested in technology will find a number of opportunities available to them. By networking outside normal courses of business, integrated systems can make their way seamlessly into new homes. **TR**

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Where to Turn

These are several resources available that builders can utilize to deepen themselves in the world of technology. Following are just a few examples.

Partner with designers of design centers

MASCO creates design centers for builders, including ones with media centers built-in (317-818-0425; www.mascoesignsolutions.com).

Attend classes in trade shows outside the building industry

Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association (CEDIA) is an option (www.cedia.org), as is EH Expo (www.chx2004.com).

Get involved with online options centers

Envision is a new online options center that offers structured wiring and optional upgrades. You'll get to know a consortium of dealers who are involved (512-371-3800; www.builderhomesite.com).