



**SDM**

# SAFE AND SOUND

Branching out from security systems, audio components are a natural outlet for growing dealers' businesses.

*By Leslie Stevens, Contributing Writer*

**T**he prospect of more money is always on your mind, but the question is how to get it. How about the addition of custom installation services that you can offer within your existing market? Of course, the big question is, which services to expand into: there's lighting, control systems, video, HVAC, audio, etc.

My vote is for audio, and here's the simple reason why: installation of audio systems are oftentimes less complicated than the other categories. Also, several entry-level products to get you started are readily available. Speakers, volume controls, wire and related components can simply be purchased through local distributors. Plus, there is a wide variety of well-respected brands in the security industry, that will provide valuable training.

#### TRAINING AND BUYING BENEFITS

Speaking of training, finding opportunities for audio installation education is easy. By joining CEDIA (Custom Electronics Design Installation Association), Indianapolis, you will find training opportunities available at their regional events, which are conducted several times a year across the country. Also, they offer training at their annual Expo. Other industry events, such as the Electronic House Expo – held twice a year, one on the East Coast and once on the West Coast – provide manufacturer-taught training courses as well. Furthermore, ADI, Melville, N.Y., conducts training at their endless number of Expos held across the nation each year.

All this training can be accomplished without becoming a certified dealer, which is required by several manufacturers when you buy direct. Of course, when you become accomplished in audio installation, you will have the credibility to buy direct. This means you can upgrade into the higher-end products.

The benefits of buying direct are clear: dealer training at the headquarters (they offer better training facilities), deeper discounts for volume purchases, dealer incentive programs, and dealer referrals. Of course, now you'll forgo the advantages of buying from a distributor, which is usually local and has quicker accessibility to products.

"We were strictly security installation and monitoring for years. We expanded into audio by installing well-know consumer brands that the homeowner could identify with. We were able to tell an exciting story about lifestyle systems that we were less familiar with," says Greg Simmons, co-owner of Eagle Sentry, Las Vegas. "Once we became fully educated in the features and benefits of distributed audio, we upgraded into high-end custom brands because we knew we could provide a compelling story. Today, several years after expanding into custom installation, a high percentage of our revenue comes from distributed audio."

#### SELECTING BRANDS

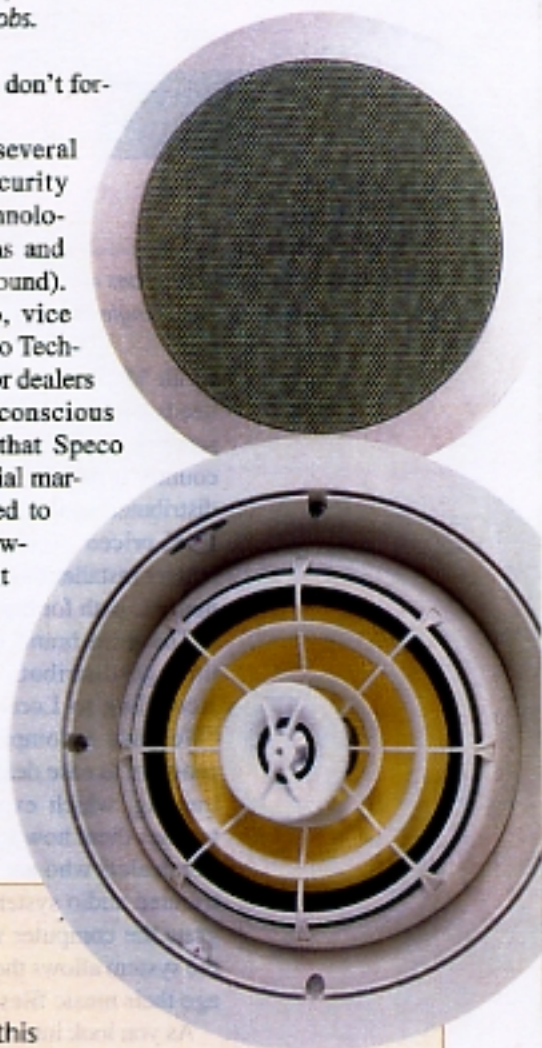
When selecting which brand to go with, there are several factors involved. First, when starting out, you should select a brand that offers ease of installation, and choose a company that provides adequate product training through industry events. Of

*Speco Technologies' line includes products that meet the needs of middle to low-end jobs.*

course, it goes without saying, don't forget to consider the margins.

As mentioned, there are several options available in the security industry, such as Speco Technologies, Proficient Audio Systems and M&S Systems (Music and Sound). According to Peter Botelho, vice president of marketing at Speco Technologies, Amityville, N.Y., "For dealers who are focused on profit-conscious installations, they will find that Speco Technologies offers a substantial margin. Our products are designed to meet the needs of middle to low-end jobs. We offer excellent product training through our independent reps, ADI Expos and at our factory. And to stay ahead of the technology

*AIM speakers from Speaker-Craft are designed with a pivoting tweeter to direct sound.*



## Beyond Basics

Once you feel comfortable installing speakers and volume controls, you should consider expanding into more elaborate audio systems, such as multi-zone/multi-source keypads, control systems and home theater audio systems.

"Coming from the security side, my best advice to someone who wishes to expand into other areas of opportunity is, don't jump in too fast," says Greg Simmons, co-owner of Eagle Sentry, Las Vegas. "Put your toes in the water before taking the big plunge. Never shoot for the big jobs right away. We took it slowly, and it was a few years before we felt confident in installing elaborate audio systems. A few years after that, we became proficient in whole-house audio/video, home theater, control, lighting and HVAC."

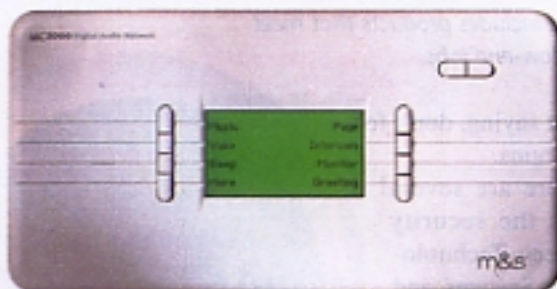
As far as challenges are concerned, the integrator new to custom installation will find that the last 5 percent of the installation is the most difficult part of the process: that is, getting the equipment to function correctly once everything is

wired up and in place. To make this process less frustrating, testing should be conducted along several points during the installation. As time goes on, you will become more familiar with the system and effective at troubleshooting.

The last component to this system is how to sell to homeowners. You know the reason to for a security system, but whole-house audio is completely different. Now you're selling an upgraded lifestyle system. This means you need to focus on the pleasures of life and the benefits of ambiance.

So emphasize the benefits of background music playing throughout the house and engage in the excitement of surround sound.

Finally, documentation will save you a lot of time and energy when troubleshooting a system or designing an upgrade several years later. You should have a comprehensive list of each wire pulled and the components used.



M&S Systems' MC2000 provides multi-room audio and intercom features on a single network.

Keith Marshall, "Proficient is very focused on the needs of residential security dealers. As a result, security dealers have adopted Proficient across the country as their brand of choice for home theater and distributed audio installations. We have nice entry-level priced product for tract developments and budget installations. We also have a logical product upgrade path for higher priced custom install jobs."

The third brand mentioned, which is available through distribution is M&S Systems, Dallas. According to Lorelei Cannon, product manager, "We have a comprehensive installation training program to ease dealers into distributed audio. Our training, which extends from rough-in to finish, teaches them how to layout a system and install it. For dealers who are interested in our MC2000 distributed audio system, we teach them how to integrate the computer with the music system, so that the system allows the homeowner to copy and manage their music files."

As you look into more custom brands, note manufacturers who have expanded product line offerings, such as fully integrated keypads, control systems and related components. Also, you should note companies who reward their dealers for high purchase volumes. It is also important to find manufacturers who are not over distributed; this way you can offer a truly custom system. And once again, consider the margins you want.

### SPEAKER SECRETS

Based on the audio application, the type of speakers you will need to select can vary. You will find a wide variety of speakers available that differ in quality, performance, price, application and placement. The size of the room will also dictate the type of speakers. For rooms that are 150 to 200 sq ft, a two-way speaker with a 6 in. woofer will do. If in the bedroom, for example, you should place a left and right speaker over the foot of the bed. In cases where

curve, we recently hired a product manager who is focused on developing advanced audio solutions."

Another provider is Proficient Audio Systems, Riverside, Calif. According to vice president

you only have room to install one speaker, such as the bathroom, closet or hallway, you should install a single speaker that contains a left and right channel, but still enables you to get stereo sound. SpeakerCraft's DT line of speakers is a good example of speakers that offers this unique feature.

As the room increases, especially if high ceilings are involved, you should move up to a three-way speaker with an 8 in. woofer. In the case of a living room, you may want to consider a 5.1 system (three speakers in the front, two in the rear, and one sub woofer), where you will want to aim the speakers toward the sitting area. Of course, you can make the assumption that the homeowner may want to re-organize the furniture at some point. Thus, this would affect the placement of the speakers.

Says Justin Jones of Just in Time, a system integrator in Riverside, Calif., "Our solution to managing re-organization of a room is that we install AIM speakers from SpeakerCraft because they are designed with a pivoting tweeter which enables us to direct the sound wherever it needs to go. So once the speakers are installed, we have successfully prevented problems that might occur down the road."

When it comes to wiring, traditional audio systems utilize a central amplifier at the distribution point and push an amplified signal over 16-gauge wire, four-conductor (16/4) speaker wire to each room. In newer systems, Cat 5 wiring connects the amplifier to wall mounted volume controls and keypads. It carries left and right audio as well as power and IR to each zone. Another new such system is A-BUS, which features distributed amplification technology. However, some critics say it is only powerful enough for background music, not home theater. ■



Proficient's AW500TT is the flagship of a line of high-performance indoor/outdoor speakers.