

# Selling with a Showroom

What does your business look like and how do you demonstrate your products? It's important to step back from time to time and take a look at your showroom, or whatever facility you have for demonstrating the technology that you design, sell and integrate into the lives of your clients. The art of the demo is best conducted in an environment ideally suited to your business style and the expectations that you set for your clients.

So, how do you most effectively use a showroom? First, if you built one, I hope that you are using it. Why aren't you using it? Did you need it in the first place? Despite the art of the demo philosophy, it is well known that many compa-

nies succeed without a showroom or demo facility. If that's working for you, then great. But for those who choose to demo, there are many things to think about once you have invested in a venue.

nies succeed without a showroom or demo facility. If that's working for you, then great. But for those who choose to demo, there are many things to think about once you have invested in a venue.

*"The art of the demo is best conducted in an environment ideally suited to your business style"*

have your staff do the same. Set aside some time each week for everyone who would conduct a demo to play with the theater. Practice makes perfect, right? Have someone give a demo to the rest of the team at your weekly staff meeting. (No weekly meeting, you say? Well, get it going, this week!). Practice will improve the chances of catching something that is malfunctioning so it can be fixed. It will also keep your staff enthusiastic about the theater, because they see you dedicating time for them to use this highly valuable and expensive resource. Keeping your staff excited about the theater is very important.

Allow your employees bring their friends and family in after hours to enjoy the theater. You might even find them bringing in a future customer.

The point of all of this is helping your employees respect your investment in your demo space. The chances of them respecting it greatly increases if they know how to use it, keep it working properly and can "play" once in a while and impress their friends.

A room vignette with a coffee table and comfy chair is another successful showroom style. While there are many variations on this theme, typical is a medium-sized room with a comfortable sitting area and a low-rise table to meet with your clients in a relaxed, but objective-oriented, setting. There is a plasma, a multi-channel speaker system, some components and a lap-friendly remote that they can play with, some lighting integration and good chairs. Chairs must be comfortable, captivating and models that



you actually sell. Make your client want to sit longer, and they will be happy. Happy people, in turn, tend to spend more money. While your client is seated, they can relax and browse your portfolio of work. Make sure that the fabric and color swatches for the chairs are close by, too. Somebody will inevitably become very interested in this piece of demo material.

Use the coffee table or conference room as much as you can. Bring your client in after they have taken the tour of your place, where they experienced outdoor music at the door, a plasma TV in the lobby, nice music inside the facility and some touchscreens along the way. Both table styles make it easy to lay out blueprints and other home and system design documents, too. Keep a small assortment of home décor magazines handy, too.

*continued on page 72*

*Buzz Delano (buzz@delanoassociates.com) brings more than 20 years of worldwide sales, marketing, customer service and business development experience to his role as CEDIA Dean for the Electronic Systems Customer Relations (ESCR) track*

Photo: Contemporary Sounds' demo theater in Oklahoma City



nies succeed without a showroom or demo facility. If that's working for you, then great. But for those who choose to demo, there are many things to think about once you have invested in a venue.

This is not about why, how, when and how much to spend on a showroom. That's a complex and highly debated matter and not one that I would present here without

do you accomplish this? Well first of all, let's assume that as good citizens of our craft, the theater is in working order. Now enter the human challenge. Do you and your staff know how to use it? No fumbling allowed here. Nothing kills a demo faster than confusion on the part of the "expert" conducting the demo.

Practice with your theater and

## Delano

continued from page 30

Another showroom option is making effective use of your entire facility without a dedicated showroom area. From the moment a client arrives at your facility, show them some bling! I'll assume that your walk-up area is at least neat and professional with some lighting and a smattering of plant life. Have outdoor music playing but not loudly. Flush-mount speakers are probably best for stealth and security but rock speakers can work well too, depending upon the setting. Go with what's sensible, but do something.

I know a custom installation/retail shop that every day upon opening puts out a pair of rock speakers neatly wired with quality cable. The rocks flank the front door during all business hours. This is really cool, yet so simple. Once inside, have a reception area plasma that is always on. Whether it's CNN, Sponge Bob or *Concert for George*, keep the darn thing on, please. Make sure there is someone there to greet visitors, even if it is you. Ask them if they like the plasma. You've begun to sell, just by asking a question; they are on your turf now and you should be selling.

The key to a "showroom" is to use it often and effectively. It should be a reflection of your business style and needs to be dignified as such by all of your staff, all of the time. You have spent a lot of time and cash to set it up, and your vendors and sales reps also have contributed to it and have a vested interest in your use and success with it.

With these showroom approaches, you put yourself in a position to do some great outreach for your business and for other complementary businesses within your community. Other than your competitors, no other business in your community sells and shows such

cool stuff. Imagine the potential for developing new referrals from hosting a local business/social mixer at your place. You could even share the cost of the event and drive business for each other, such as with a furniture dealer or high-end home re-modeler...or both.

Show some cool stuff, spread the word and let's grow the market for custom installation audio, video and home automation. That's always in style.

## IP Telephony

continued from page 40

separate VLANs. Wide area connections over the Internet can be improved through the use of a SIP-prioritizing router, which improves voice quality on the most critical Internet segment—the last mile. The only WAN connection that will provide perfect voice is a digital tie-line, which is beyond what most customers will pay; however, many customers will be pleased with the voice quality they get from a simple broadband connection.

Another alternative commonly used is redundant broadband. Companies often buy DSL or cable-modem service from two separate providers and then marry the connections using a load balancing router. This provides both increased bandwidth and redundancy, which can dramatically reduce service calls.

In the coming years more VoIP CLECs will offer VoIP service with interoperability to specific phone switches. The great benefit of this architecture is that customers can have as many simultaneous calls as their broadband service can support without any monthly charge for trunks. This results in big savings in both hardware and monthly service fees. We should also see more CLECs offer VoIP Centrex service which will cut into small business phone system

sales, but will have little effect on high-end residential.

Most exciting is the advent of Video-over-IP phones that are now making their debut. Some even include XML programmable touch panels that are perfect for the CEDIA market. Expect this summer to see PBX manufacturer's that have programmed touch-panel video phones to send commands to a home automation control system.

*John T. Cox is president and CEO of Xperinet Inc. in Annapolis, Maryland.*

## van Zuiden

continued from page 42

integrating it with more traditional analog-based audio distributions systems like those from Russound, Niles or Sonance. Using the Sonos ZonePlayer as one of the line source inputs to, say a Russound system, you can take advantage of the in-wall keypad controls of the Russound system. In this configuration, you can select audio sources and provide source control for a given room and still enjoy the benefits of Sonos' great wireless graphical controller when you select the Sonos input on your Russound keypad. Here's an example:

You have a client who wants to have an AM/FM tuner, satellite music, XM radio and digital music as sources to a whole-house audio system. You design this Russound four-source system as you normally would with the appropriate input sources and IR control. Now, however, you use the Sonos ZonePlayer (connected on the network to a network storage drive that has the digital music) as an input for the digital music instead of, for example, using the audio out of a computer that contains the digital songs. The benefit of this approach is that the homeowner can now fully see and control

the digital music that they are listening to in any room of the home (or even in the backyard) from Sonos' wireless remote (a greatly improved interface over what you usually find on whole-house audio controls, unless you move all the way up to the much more costly Crestron or AMX control solutions.)

The new Sonos Digital Music System is as revolutionary to the distribution of whole-house digital music as the Kaleidescape system is to the whole-house distribution of high-quality digital video. It offers an exceptionally easy-to-use remote, the flexibility to listen to thousands of digitally recorded songs throughout the home and the scalability to easily add new wireless music receivers and remote controls to the home. I predict that the Sonos Digital Music System will be a very popular product for the digitally enlightened home integrator. I can't think of a single customer that we currently serve who wouldn't want to integrate this compelling product into his or her home.

## Grimani

continued from page 54

are often measured in dBm. Now, there's another interesting story: 0dBm is the voltage that would yield 1 mW of power across a 600-Ohm resistor. That happens to be 775 mV. Why this odd number and not simply a reference to 1 volt? It's from the early days when all the engineering and gear was borrowed from the telephony business where loads are 600 Ohms and power is precious. The pro audio business adopted that measurement method and still runs with it. Most recently, the 600-Ohm impedance has been dropped and the scale changed to dBu. It is still referenced to 775mV. Once in a while you will see a dBV expression which is more simply referenced to that 1 V value.