

Summer Plans

Well folks, it is July and summer-time everywhere. While I have been having fun, I have also been thinking about the sales that residential electronics system contractors make. "Always be selling," as someone once told me.

Think about your business. There are new customers and referrals coming in all the time, but what about when business slows down, or better yet, you decide you want to *grow* your business? As

"Now is a good time to try new ideas so that by 2007 you're closing big jobs for Super Bowl, Memorial Day summer kick-offs, and graduation parties"

scary a thought as it might be, now is the best time to do that. When things are good and you have a little chill time, rest and relaxation opens the mind to creative thinking. Bottle it up and take it back to work and get your team stoked to sell more based on the kinds of sales that you should be going for.

Let's talk about the main types of sales that you can make: new home, retro/re-model, upgrade to builder standards, home theaters,

technology upgrades, and after-service sales. That's a good six-pack. You're probably good at some of these and maybe you don't even do some of them. That's OK, not all work is for everyone and your business model has been specially tailored for what works for you. Or does it?

New home installations are usually the domain of those RESCs (Residential Electronic Systems Contractors) who have multiple

crews and a fairly routine set of system configurations that they will offer. Good sales often require that a strong business relationship be cultivated with the builder's management team. As well, cash flow planning is more critical due to extended payment practices common in the construction trade. In other words, a solid business is necessary if you plan to enter this selling scenario.

Retrofit and remodels are a

huge market for our industry, but it is hard work and requires innovation and patience. You're working in someone's home and they want cool stuff installed with minimal intrusion to their space. You and your team have to be ultra-respectful of your clients in these jobs and be open-minded to change orders as the clients re-think their plans during the project.

Upgrades to builder standards are certainly a breed of retrofit work, but they represent a great opportunity for you to recommend solutions. If the homeowner is wishing that they had opted for speakers in all bedrooms, an extra keypad for the garage speakers and theater for the game room, then you are going to be their hero. Get creative in the game room by showing them what they can do with lighting control and a pair of plasmas; maybe a couple of games can be watched simultaneously while foosball, billiards, or a late-night card game gets fired up. The builder certainly hasn't thought of this. It is too complicated for them but not for you.

When it comes time to talk about the rooms with missing speakers, ask if any of the rooms with speakers would be better with



a higher bass speaker. You can upgrade those rooms from the typical six-inch speakers that are in there to eight-inch speakers, then transfer the six-incher to the rooms in need of speakers. Of course, you could go for eight-inch speakers in all rooms too. And, just how many iPods does your client have and how will they want to use them in their home system?

Home theaters are fun and require good planning and system design. This is all about transforming a space into something really cool to be shown off. Think everything through and really understand what will make your customer happy. Do they want a projector and screen? Sure but will they be happy with this? If their kids often use the room, it may not be the best choice. It takes a little time for a projector to warm up and perhaps for the screen to drop and it makes for a nice presentation, but a large plasma might be better. And with those ambient light issues, the plasma wins again. What about seating? Do you want theater-style or mutated beanbags? These are cool and fun but not for everyone.

Will this be a family room home

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MANAGEMENT MODULE

D-Tools Automates AutoCAD Functionality

CONCORD, CA—D-Tools Inc. has added enhanced AutoCAD functionality in its System Integrator software. Leveraging the new capabilities with AutoCAD 2006, D-Tools users can work directly in AutoCAD to automate the creation of AutoCAD blocks for elevation, plan,

functional, and schematic drawings for inclusion in D-Tools System Integrator project files. Middle Atlantic Products is the first manufacturer to embrace this new functionality. Dimensionally correct Middle Atlantic Products rack blocks—tied to detailed product data—can now be easily created by D-Tools users native within AutoCAD. These blocks



re-size themselves to scale based on the number of rack spaces or the actual height, width, and depth dimensions of each specific Middle Atlantic Products rack model.

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Career By Design

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These individuals would benefit greatly from working in the field for six to 12 months so that they can earn real-world experience and learn how to be good designers. They can also attend the Electronic Systems Technician boot camp and get hands-on training so they can gain some perspective on working in the industry.

CEDIA has developed 17 Designer core curriculum courses to debut at CEDIA EXPO 2006. These courses cover 100- and 200-level courses. Prerequisites are now mandatory because CEDIA education is designed to build upon itself and make professionals knowledgeable in all areas of design.

Seminar courses are still offered in other settings, but the new ESD core curriculum achieves consistent, content-based results with a variety of instructors. CEDIA University's new model is built for substance and credibility, making CEDIA Certification more valuable.

The Last Word. Technology changes at an ever-increasing pace. The developments of the past five years outpaced the developments of the previous decade. CEDIA University is the singular destination for an industry education that helps business owners achieve growth and profitability in a marketplace that moves at such breakneck speeds. New and seasoned residential electronic systems contractors will find the ESD core curriculum an important part of such success.

Similar to the other CEDIA colleges, the ESD core curriculum will be updated constantly with the latest information, codes, laws, and other regulations. This creates a consistent platform where designers can learn the basics and develop advanced skills. Designers who believe that they are thriving in their role may not be aware of recent industry developments that can help them polish their work and their individual client services.

That brings us back to the specific industry career paths that make CEDIA University a universal platform. Industry professionals who wish to experience success in their field must stay current. It is central to keeping pace.

Mario Leone is co-founder of Electronic Solution Company, an electronics systems contracting business with offices in Cinnaminson, New Jersey, and Reading, Pennsylvania. Joel Rosenblatt is principal of AV Marketing Consultants in Londonderry, New Hampshire. Both are curriculum deans for the CEDIA University Designer College.

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theater or closer to a media room? It's a big difference except that both take serious planning as the space is focused around the theater requirements and experience. Sound control, lighting, HVAC, seating and power requirements are just a few of the major ingredients to consider extensively even before you figure out viewing system, components, and speakers.

Technology upgrades are a cool reason to contact your previous clients. There have been huge advances in control, software management, and storage. You should be keeping up with this and make sure that your sales team is thinking about previous clients from a few years ago who would benefit from a technology upgrade. Maybe they are ready for a projection system and a much larger screen than they opted for last time. Good time to make them happy all over again, and to make a new sale.

After-service sales are good sales to make not only because they bring you additional revenue but also because, to the customer, you are selling your value as an expert. Since you designed it, sold it and educated them about elements of the system that require monitoring and the occasional firmware upgrade, you want to be there to enhance their experience with the gear after they have lived with it for a while.

No need to program everything up front. They can't learn it all anyway. Program and teach them a few things that they must know, and include in your contract a series of post-sale visits for system review, additional programming innovation, and a way to keep them informed of new advances in the business. You will need to be sensitive to timing on the latter but after a year it's reasonable to let them know that two things have occurred: a cooler piece of hardware is now available and you want them to learn about it from you. Secondly, your skills and those of your team have gotten better over time. That's a powerful way to convey to your clients that you are always striving to make your company better. It should also get you some good referrals.

The idea here is that you need to be thinking now about the types of sales you can make that you haven't yet. Now is a good time to try new ideas so that by 2007 you're closing big jobs for Super Bowl, Memorial Day summer kick-offs, and graduation parties. It takes time to plan something new and different and there's no time like the present.