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Pete Baker

System Control

Ease of Use Determines User Satisfaction With Any Professionally Installed AV System.

When it comes down to it, most consumers are actually terrified of purchasing professionally installed entertainment systems. Unfortunately, as a dealer, this means that every client you meet with is also scared of you. The reason is simple: when making significant investments, consumers are used to having a basic understanding of the elements involved. For example, when buying a car, they understand the difference between four-, six- and eight-cylinder engines and how this relates to power. However, when purchasing an AV system, the same can't be said for their understanding of 1080i vs. 1080p, HDMI vs. component, Dolby® Digital surround sound, etc.

This lack of understanding translates into fear; and their biggest fear: that they are going to make this huge investment and won't be able to operate the complex system. As a dealer, it is important to recognize this and understand that system control is not only vital to closing the sale, but key in making the customer comfortable and satisfied with their new system. Of course, this can be easier said than done, so let's take a look at the key elements involved in giving your customers the best (control) experience possible.

Intuitiveness

At the heart of intuitiveness lies customization. As entertainment systems vary by their degree of complexity, control should be custom tailored to each one. At the most basic level, programmable, button-only controllers offer a degree of automation through macro commands, which can be programmed into the buttons. By employing these commands, pressing a single button

— such as “On”— can turn on every component in the system. Nothing more than a single button press is required by the end user.

Taking it a step further, custom labeling the buttons can make the user experience even more intuitive. For example, a “Watch TV” button can be created, and by pressing it, all components required to achieve this specific activity will be turned on and automatically switched to the right settings.

Adding a touchscreen display with a customizable graphical user interface (GUI) adds another degree of intuitiveness. GUIs can be completely customized to the end user and their system configuration, providing a more personal experience and making control much simpler. The interface should be made to speak specifically to the customer's needs. For example, for a family watching TV, there can be a page for “kid channels” and a page for “mom and dad channels.”

Whenever possible, the interface design should be consistent across all control devices in the project—from handheld controllers to mobile devices—regardless of screen size or resolution. The actions required and choices available to the user should have a similar theme and degree of familiarity. Often, unique interfaces are used in different areas of the home, making system operation much more complicated for the end user than it needs to be, which leads to frustration—and frustration leads to dissatisfaction with the system and no referral.

Maintaining a consistent GUI means a familiar, intuitive control experience for the end user, no matter where they are in their home, and a consumer who understands, uses and loves their system, which reflects positively on you and your business.

Two-Way Communication & Feedback

Bi-directional communication is an amazing development that takes intuitiveness to a whole new level by providing the user with instant feedback on all aspects of their AV and home environment, including information such as playlists and volume level, and even the status of a security system or the temperature of their home.

A good way to understand the importance of feedback in your customers' control systems is an example of calling an elevator. If you've hit the button, and it doesn't come right away, chances are you're going to keep pushing the button out of frustration. However, if you receive feedback from your call button request about what floor it is currently on as it makes its descent, you will only push the button once since you know it's coming. The same concept holds true for system control. Whether it's adjusting audio volume levels or the temperature, having feedback gives a more connected, interactive experience for the user and lets them know their actions are taking effect.

Tablets & Smartphones

Tablets and smartphones are incredibly popular devices. From finan-



RTI's RTIPanel app

VENDORVIEW

cial institutions to newspapers, consumers are increasingly looking for access to every aspect of their lives on their mobile devices through apps, especially on Apple® products like the iPod Touch®, iPhone® and iPad®. Control of their home electronic systems is certainly no exception. Dealers can and should offer their customers access to their systems on these devices as a complement to the main control system, as they provide convenient remote access to their electronic environment from virtually anywhere in the world. Users can check in on their security systems when on vacation, set the temperature at home to the perfect setting before their arrival, or turn off the lights if they left them on. It's a powerful combination of technologies and offers a cool added convenience benefit for consumers.

Where dealers need to be careful, however, is using a tablet or smartphone as the exclusive, primary control device. The reason for this is that these devices simply aren't as practical as dedicated controllers. With the ability to use them to play games, read books, listen to music, and a whole lot more, it is hard to count on the devices being in their intended room to control the media when it is required. Another issue is that many of them rely on Wi-Fi. So if the network goes down, control over the system does also. And without hard buttons for tactile control, it simply doesn't offer the comfortable navigation of a professional control device.

So don't just sell a tablet as the only control element. Ultimately, it may leave the customer frustrated. If your customer insists on using a tablet or smartphone as the primary controller, make sure they have a companion remote to enhance the experience, such as RTI's SURFiR for the iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch.

As a companion to these devices, the controller provides instant connectivity and hard buttons for tactile control, eliminating the need for swipes or switching between applications on devices to perform basic control functions.

A companion remote or dedicated control device should be included in every installation to ensure a positive user experience.



RTI's SURFiR for the iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch

In Conclusion

For dealers, it's important to remember that ultimately, when a system is complete and installed, it won't matter how well the installation went, how courteous the technicians were, or how amazing the picture and sound quality are. That is, these things won't matter if the customer can't even turn the system on. At the end of the project, the primary element your customer will judge all your hard work on is how easy the system is to operate. So if you only get one thing right, make sure it's the control system! **CB**

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Get on the Network

An RS-232 and IR to IP Gateway

For years, "Automation" meant "Wires- lots of them". Each device that needed automating needed dedicated wiring run back to a centrally-located "brain" that controlled the system. Adding a new device meant adding a new control cable, which was a nightmare- especially after a project was completed.

The Professional Automation Control System (PACS) allows IP control of Gefen devices using RS-232 or IR, and other A/V devices (displays, Blu-ray players, cable/satellite boxes, lighting systems, motorized screens, etc.) from any Web-enabled smartphone, WiFi tablet, laptop, or automation system.

The Web user interface allows IR, RS-232, and 12V trigger commands to be sent by the PACS to the connected devices to execute the desired functions. The configurable IR, RS-232, and 12V DC trigger signals allow the PACS to be compatible with most A/V devices. The PACS can learn, store, and manage IR commands of different manufacturers' remotes. The 12V DC triggers are highly configurable to work with the different requirements of various devices. Use with the new Gefen A/V Automation System Processor to create a complete control system.



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