



The HTA: The Best Kept Secret

By: Stephen Hann, President of Hann Builders

The Home Technology Alliance (HTA) is the brainchild of CEDIA and the NAHB. In a very short time it has become a melting pot of ideas and exchange of information that ultimately has resulted in greater utilization of technology and better communication among the builders, remodelers and electronic systems contractors (ESCs).

The HTA is a committee under the umbrella of the Custom Builder Committee of the National Association of Home Builders. Its members include representatives of CEDIA, manufacturers, ESCs, custom builders and remodelers from all over the country. It is well-structured with working committees that are focused on education and nurturing an environment of shared information. The ultimate goal is to make the integration of home technology easier, quicker and more cost-effective.

As you can imagine everyone comes to the party from a different perspective. Even custom builders have different protocols and priorities from one company to the next. But what I have found in my involvement so far is there are some great ideas and information that can be shared among the different disciplines. There are models already established that can be integrated without reinventing the wheel. As a small businessman, that appeals to me because we have to be efficient and effective to be profitable. Through my participation, I have been able to determine some of the most popular applications of home technology and then gather the missing information to incorporate that into our offering as a sales tool to our perspective clients. The more I can set the company apart or show that we do more than our competition in our marketplace, the better chance I have of signing more deals. Furthermore, I have been able to discuss with other builders how they market and package the technology aspects of their product to determine the approach that fits best with our customer service philosophy. This continues to be a process as I am able to evaluate the tradeoffs between profitability, and the best way to serve our clients. I have also learned how to minimize the schedule implications and warranty ramifications of a variety of applications. This has significantly shortened the implementation of new products that our customers have asked for because I have a litany of resources available to me which has saved us money and helped me to bring my team up to speed quicker than if I had to do it all myself.

As the HTA gains momentum and more professionals participate I expect the advantages to increase exponentially. The more diverse the input and the more resources available the quicker it shortens the cycle time for market penetration and acceptance. I have already experienced this in looking at different lighting control options even within a single manufacturer.

Another distinct advantage is learning about emerging technologies or, bet-

ter yet, established technologies that have a track record in other markets but have not been made it to mine yet. Let's face it—as builders and remodelers, we are often reluctant to grab a hold of new products because we have all experienced problems in the past and it is safer to use what we know. Through my involvement in the HTA I have been able to see how medical monitoring devices are already being utilized in some markets and offer it in mine (when no one else is) and do so having learned from others going through the learning curve for me.

Think about the advantages here for a minute. I get a competitive edge by bringing something into my market and I have minimized the risk by researching and discussing the implementation with others that have already had experience and can point out the pitfalls, problems and opportunities they have already discovered. It is the same type of benefit some of us get from networking with our peers in programs like the Builder 20 clubs. The peer-to-peer sharing has made me money.

Another benefit that has come from the interactions is better communication and understanding between the trades that install the equipment. In our discussions about the best systems to accomplish the clients goals we have learned what questions to ask and who to best ask them. In most cases we introduce the electronic systems contractor to our client so they can review the scopes of work and to discuss options directly with the client. As we work together with different personality types we have learned more about each other and the challenges we all face as we approach a project. This has really opened our eyes on each side of the table. I have actually had to stop one electronic systems contractor after a very detailed explanation and ask them to translate what they just said. He was a little surprised at my request until the client piped in and said, "Yes, please I did not understand that." His explanation was technically correct but over the heads of both myself and the client. This turned out to be a very beneficial interaction because we all learned a better way to work together for the clients best interest and ultimately in resulted in a sale of additional work for both of us.

I invite you to participate in the Home Technology Alliance at any of the NAHB board meetings or the International Builder Show in Las Vegas in January. Log onto at www.NAHB.org and register for the newsletter if you are a member or look for updates through the HTA's founding partner, CEDIA. ■

