# LESS IS MORE

Jeremy Turner, director, FAB

Jeremy Turner, director of installation company FAB, says installers need to listen more closely to what the customer wants.

One question I get asked on occasion by friends and acquaintances who don't work in the CI industry is: 'What is it you do exactly?' and I think this answer is one that is often overlooked or misinterpreted by commercial installers. Simply, we provide a service.

Technology is at a point where the design, installation and commissioning of a home automation or entertainment system is well beyond the level of interest and technical skill of most of the population. Therefore, those that can afford to, look for someone to do this for them, someone to make it simple.

Although, admittedly, we have done numerous installs for IT professionals who would have no issue wiring together a home cinema or even programming a Philips Pronto, if they were that way inclined. Importantly, they're **not** that way inclined – and don't want to spend weeks or months shopping around and learning the market in order to figure out what 'the best' is – they just know they want it – and don't want to make costly mistakes that they may regret for years to come

Furthermore, recent events in the financial markets are starting to have a real impact on our industry. We believe that people serious about being successful in this current market, need to understand very carefully what their customers are buying from them and why.

In the launch issue of *Essential Install* the comment columnist (Adam Rackman, technical director of Image Audio, Ed) talked about similar issues, but took the view that products like Sonos are 'too simple' for custom installers to sell, as they do everything that more complex (expensive) systems do, possibly even do a better job, but are too cheap. We would like to respectfully disagree with that position and ask where companies like that will be in five years time when more products eventually catch up to the Sonos level of ease and sophistication at 'traditional' CI tasks? Multi-room video anyone? Right now, this is pretty much a CI only area, but that will change and there's no reason to believe that within a few years it will be any harder than setting up a Sonos system.

Do you really believe the end game for companies like Kaleidescape isn't to be able to develop products to sell direct to end users and benefit from the massive increase in potential market size? BT and Sky are also looking at entering this market from a different route with IP services. The fact is that technology is always going to move forwards, become more advanced, with simpler interfaces to use and set up. Companies who trade on selling 'voodoo' to clients will struggle to find a compelling reason for their services as technology and the market develops. Custom installers who understand that their customers are buying peace-of-mind, simplicity and the integration of this technology into their clients' lives, are more likely to survive and thrive. Furthermore, if the best source equipment you can use is cheap, doesn't that mean you can add more products and features into the overall system for the same budget, rather than just lower the cost?

One recent example where we have enjoyed some fantastic successes with Sonos in particular will demonstrate our thinking here. One fairly typical customer in Kensington (a very wealthy, elderly couple) wanted a music system, but were extremely wary when they came to us as they have been burned by unreliable and overly-complex systems in the past. Even though their budget was pretty much unlimited, we installed Sonos with high-end amplification and discrete 'style' speakers (where we make much more margin anyway!). The customers now describe it as 'the best technology product they've ever bought', which has given them the confidence in our abilities and a clear demonstration of the value of the service we provide. This has directly led to more work on their house in London and referrals to their friends and family. We are also in the process of finalising terms on a similar job at their house in Paris, with a view to also doing another residences in the near future. Yes, they could get someone local to do this – but they want us to do the work.

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Had we specified a product based on their budget as opposed to the features they wanted, this would not have happened. We would have had a lot less work – and we would have made a lot less money.

So, in summary, less cost on a small part of a system has led to less confusion, less complexity and has demonstrably led to more happy customers, more work, and most importantly, more profit. Less is definitely more!

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