

Digital Answer Man

Creating A Home Audio/Video Network

(NAPS)—According to a recent survey, the average American household contains 25 consumer electronics products. In today's column, Jim Barry a.k.a. the "Digital Answer Man" of the Consumer Electronics Association explains that one of today's hot trends is connecting these devices to create



Jim Barry

an entertainment and information network.

1.) I'm hearing a lot about home networks. Is this just for computers?

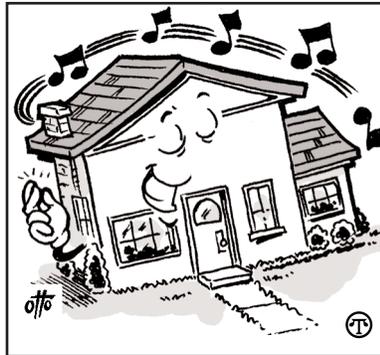
Not necessarily. While millions of Americans have several home computers connected in a network, the real fun can be in connecting home entertainment devices in a system to enjoy audio and video everywhere in the home.

2.) Do I have to buy lots of expensive new equipment?

No, especially if you already have a home-audio system. There are many ways to spread music around the house inexpensively. All A/V receivers have some multi-room audio capability through a tape loop. Others facilitate multi-room audio via the "second zone" output. You also have the option of connecting a transmitter and wireless speakers.

3.) What if I want something more sophisticated?

This is where things really start to get interesting. Basically, you need a source for music and video, amplifiers, a control system including remotes, speakers (including some built into walls



and ceiling), and wiring. This is known in the business as "Multi-Room Audio Video" or MRAV for short.

4.) What do you mean by "source"?

That's where the music (or video) is stored or generated. It can be a single-source CD "juke-box" with hundreds of discs to choose from or a multisource system that can operate a number of products (CD, MP3, satellite radio) simultaneously in different rooms. Some manufacturers now even make it easy for you to use your iPod or other digital music player as a source for a multi-room system.

5.) What about the controls?

Some new models of A/V receivers with sophisticated remote controls are designed to serve as the control center for a custom-installed MRAV system. But the more elaborate systems use one or more touch-pad controllers, which can monitor and manage heating, lighting, security and audio/video entertainment systems.

6.) Can I do it through my PC?

Yes. Some new A/V receivers are designed to connect with PCs and broadband Internet modems. These models use Ethernet, USB or wireless connections to play music stored on a PC's hard drive or downloaded from the Internet. There's also a new category of PCs, called "Media Servers" that are designed to store and send audio, video and other digital content throughout the house.

7.) What are some of the ways to make the connections?

Simple speaker wire connected to speakers around the house works for audio. "Structured wiring" including cables, PC-like Ethernet connections or wireless technologies can deliver audio and video to many rooms from one or more source. For instance, you can monitor a security camera while watching a movie.

8.) Sounds complicated, can I do it myself?

You can if you're handy but you'll probably want to consult a professional installer. The best time to integrate a multiroom system is when you are remodeling your house or building a new one. The average cost to distribute audio throughout a house is about \$1000 per room, a small portion of the price of a new house.

In any event, you'll want to talk to your contractor beforehand about wiring for MRAV and ask about working with an experienced TechHome Integrator. Check out the TechHome.com Web site featuring the integrator referral database, listing integrators throughout the country.

Did You Know?

According to a recent survey, the average American household contains 25 consumer electronics products. Learn about integrating them at the TechHome.com Web site.