

Skill Building For Home Theater



Dealers tackle both A and V to grow a business through service and knowledge

DEEPEST LONG ISLAND, N.Y.-They came from as far away as the U.S. Virgin Islands. They came from military bases, from small retailers and major manufacturers. They came as installers, technicians and home theater enthusiasts. Above all they came to learn primarily how to make service and knowledge the differentiating factor in their business. To that end, they came for the four-day course, titled "Maximizing Home Theater Performance," sponsored by Sencore, Inc.



Attendees use a color analyzer to calibrate a TV

For almost a year now, Sencore, which specializes in the manufacture of electronic testing equipment, has sponsored this four-day class, taking it on the road for installers, retailers and other interested people in the audio and video business. The course combines training in both Imaging Science Foundation video calibration techniques and Home Acoustics Alliance audio calibration techniques as well as discussions on selecting, setting up and selling high-end home theater products. In today's economic climate, the retailer that can differentiate itself from competitors will be the one that builds clients. Having the best products and the best showrooms may not be enough anymore- retailers have to have knowledge and skillfully present that knowledge to consumers.

While Sencore has been involved with educating people in video

calibration for years, the addition of the HAA audio component was a new, but necessary venture.

"Acoustics and audio and video go hand-in-hand," said Loel Wheeler, account manager with Sencore. Both the ISF and HAA provide training courses independent of Sencore, but the combining of the two has proved convenient and popular with attendees.

The four-day drilldown at the Long Island Marriott started with two days of indoctrination in high-end video theory by ISF President Joel Silver and ISF instructors Jim Doolittle and Kevin Miller.

Day One: How to sell by talking in language clients will understand. Rather than debate pixels and resolution, talk about picture quality and image detail. Attendees learned about the history of television and the NTSC and ATSC television standards, how cables and room lighting affect picture quality, how different products deal with anamorphic material, the difference between progressive and interlaced video and how to use front-panel controls to improve picture.

Day Two: Video Calibration. Armed with Sencore VP300 video generators and Sencore Color Pro analyzers, as well as some non-Sencore products from Minolta, Philips and AV Standards, everyone assaulted the various displays around the hotel conference room. After a discussion in the use of display service menu controls, attendees took turns fine tuning CRTs in direct view, rear and front projection DLP projectors and a plasma display panel.

Days Three and Four: Audio. The next two days were presented by

Maximizing Your Home Theater upcoming dates and locations

Hayward	CA	11/15/01
Tempe	AZ	12/08/01
Las Vegas	NV	01/12/02
Portland	OR	01/24/02
Atlanta	GA	02/07/02
Boca Raton	FL	02/24/02
Los Angeles	CA	03/17/02
San Diego	CA	03/21/02
Hartford	CT	04/16/02
Boston	MA	04/20/02
Dallas	TX	05/14/02
Houston	TX	05/18/02

By Grant Clauser

HAA instructor Gary Lemay of Quest Acoustical Interiors. Like the ISF, the HAA is a teaching organization, its focus on promoting optimum acoustical performance from a space, through acoustical design and calibration. On the first day of HAA instruction, Lemay introduced some of the basics of home theater audio design and the science of room acoustics. For people accustomed to simply setting speakers around the room and hooking up the A/V receiver this was an eye opener. Demonstrations performed with test signals, audio analyzers and acoustical treatments reinforced the point that the loudspeakers' environment has as much to do with good sound as the speakers themselves.

On the second day, all the participants came to class with diagrams of home theaters or listening rooms for the group to discuss and offer suggestions. Among the challenges presented were rooms with odd shapes, large glass windows, stairs and half walls, and decorators who insisted that no speakers be visible.

Among the techniques used to obtain optimum audio performance were speaker placement, understanding room modes, resonance identification, graphic real time analysis, energy time graph analysis and the use of acoustical treatment panels.

The course included instruction in home theater design, including the use of software to help with room dimensions and mode calculations.

Subwoofer use, soundproofing, rear effect placement and bass traps were also covered. Part of the course covered how to use the Sencore SP295 audio analyzers and how to use acoustic calibration reports.

Many of the installer/retailer attendees had immediate plans to put this training to use. Mark McAuliff, vice-president of Bro-Tech, Inc, a high-end audio, video and home automation company in Long Island, explained that he wants his company to be able to provide a superior product to his clients, so he seeks out avenues such as these classes to develop skills for himself and his employees. He plans to start doing grayscale video calibrations. "I want to be able to take a TV and make it as beautiful as I can."

Eliab Alvarez De La Campa, of Elizabeth, NJ., came primarily for the HAA component and to brush up on HDTV technology. An experienced video calibrator who runs his own home theater calibration company, Avical.com, he said, "This one is completely pushing me to the limits. Going to this course has got me interested in pursuing CEDIA certification."

De La Campa plans to implement audio into his business by January. "Audio analysis and room treatment is a virtually untapped market for home theater enthusiasts," he said. \$

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