

# CONNECTED HOME Solutions

\$12.95

Jan/Feb 2006

INSIDE: NEWS, VIEWS & PLENTY OF CLUES

## Beam me up

Nothing square about this laser levelling device



## Assistive living Technology lends a helping hand



PARTNER

**CEDIA**

CUSTOM  
ELECTRONIC  
DESIGN &  
INSTALLATION  
ASSOCIATION

## Sights and sounds

Stacks of stuff to please  
audio and video buffs



ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE CONNECTED HOME INDUSTRY



# TOTAL CONTROL

Control4 is set to change the culture of home automation by making it easily accessible and affordable for owners of existing properties. It may also radically change the way installers market the smart home to clients.

**T**he world of home automation continues to grow with new and exciting products entering the market on a regular basis. It was this growth, accompanied by the obvious headache of how to connect existing homes with new home automation technologies, that inspired the creation of Control4.

The US-based company manufactures a complete line of affordable wired and wireless home automation products. It began shipping

products in April 2005 and is the first to deliver 802.15.4 (ZigBee) wireless products that can be retrofitted into any home – making safety, convenience, comfort and economy available to virtually any homeowner.

The creators of Control4 – Will West, Mark Morgan and Eric Smith – recognised that giving homes access to IP and wireless technologies would allow them to take advantage of home automation.

They also recognised that home automation dealers often recommend numerous products to clients, but give little thought to the subtleties of integration.

Control4 showcased its home automation products and services at the CEDIA Expo in Indianapolis, US, in September 2005. The highlight of the Control4 stand was the Home Theatre Controller, featuring a simple on-screen interface that eliminates the need for multiple

remotes. By connecting an iPod, external USB or network hard drive, the controller can distribute and manage digital music, and, with a few affordable extras, climate, lighting and security.

"The controller delivers huge value, creating an affordable, powerful and easy-to-use media management solution for consumers for the first time," CEO Will West says. "We have seen a tremendous market response for all of our products, especially the controller, which demonstrates that the smart home is here today, and is not just for the wealthy anymore," he says.

Nick Libertone, managing director of Convergent Technologies, the Australian distributor of Control4, agrees with Will, saying that the company is serious about training and educating dealers to tap into a broad market of clients.

"Control4 is not a product to come in and take on Creston or AMX," he says. "Most of their market is high-end new homes and because, traditionally, their system has to be cabled, it



The wall-mounted mini touch screen has all the features of a full-sized touch panel and a remote audio server packed into a compact 4" screen. It can also become an "instant audio zone," able to receive and deliver audio streams, wired or wireless, to an amplifier from its location.



**Left:** Control4's graphical user interface (GUI) is automatically generated and accessible via touch screen, remote control or on-screen TV interfaces. **Above:** Control4 has been available since April 2005 and is the first to deliver 802.15.4 (ZigBee) wireless products that can be retrofitted into any home making safety, convenience, comfort and economy available to virtually any homeowner.

makes retrofitting quite difficult. We want to look at ways to compete by reducing the price of the product and make it easy to retrofit," Nick explains.

"Lowering the price gets us to the middle market, and by getting us into existing homes, the market becomes gigantic. Because of the way we structure the buying of the product we can make it scalable, so the consumer can come in and spend very little in the beginning and keep spending as they want to add on."

### CONTROL FIRST, SYSTEM SECOND

Nick says Control4's price point allows dealers and installers to change the way they sell custom systems. Instead of focussing on a new audio system with automation attached, they can sell a new automation system with audio attached. Nick feels this subtle shift of focus gives the dealer growth potential.

"It's a big culture change but I believe you need to treat it that way," Nick says. "Most

dealers come from traditional audio or hi-fi background so they sell traditional AV products. Some took on the philosophy of adding on accessories such as a smart remote, but the Control4 system is far more powerful than that and can quite literally change the culture and the format of their business."

### INSTALLER FRIENDLY

While the controller is the brain of the home automation architecture, a number of software packages have been created to simplify the home automation process. These include Composer and Navigator, which allow for simple and time effective set up, installation and use.

"Composer reduces days of programming to minutes. It is drag and drop software that comes with built in macros. It allows for simple installations of plasmas, satellite receivers or any other video components," Nick says.

"Navigator is the graphical user interface (GUI) used to control automated appliances.

Once the home is configured using Composer, the Navigator GUI is automatically generated and accessible via touch screen, remote control or on-screen TV interfaces."

Nick says that "because 90% of programmers are lousy graphic designers", standardised graphics have been used to make it attractive while staying generic for simple navigation. "That way clients know where to go," he adds.

"If you know your way around a computer you can install this," Nick says. Nick is setting up hands-on training to prepare dealers before they start selling. "They also need to acquire a demo kit so they can maintain familiarity with the program," he says. ■

### CONTACTS

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