Seeing is Believing

CyberManor Open House Demos Latest Multi-App Home Tech

A PianoDisc player piano plays songs recorded by professionals and stored in digital format on a tablet in smartphone for guests attending the cyberManor Smart Home Experience Center.

About 150 guests mingled outside in the back yard, sipping cocktails while—like magic—an unmanned piano accompanied a Michael Buble concert displayed on a rear-projection screen.

This was one of the more attention-grabbing scenes created by cyberManor's Smart Home Experience Center, shown off at a recent open house in Los Gatos, CA. The idea was to "give people a chance to see, touch, feel, and learn about all those things we do for our clients in a very real home setting," explained Gordon van Zuiden, president of the integration firm.

The Experience Center is a reflection of van Zuiden's multi-app home approach to automation, a concept he introduced in March 2014 with a whitepaper "Digital Platform Strategies for the Connected Home."

The premise of this idea is that individual manufacturers maintain their apps and updates to them more effectively than a third party control company can—a pretty major departure from the traditional custom installed home automation system.

As van Zuiden states in the whitepaper, "While a single application total home control solution would seem to be very desirable over using multiple applications to control the home, the reality is that this model can actually stifle the innovation of the digital platforms that they control for the purpose of a providing a unified control system."

The piano effect was achieved by a PianoDisc player piano, which plays songs recorded by professionals and stored in digital format on a tablet or smartphone. Content is streamed to the piano while the rest of the orchestral sound and vocals are played through the whole-house audio system, with video as well.

One of the other high points of interest at the open house included a Sonance invisible speaker in the kitchen, mounted in the wall and connected to a Sonos amp, controlled by an iPad mounted in the face of the refrigerator. The 4K Netflix video streams were a big hit as well. "People didn't realize how good that content would look," van Zuiden said. There were similar reactions on the audio side, where showcasing the Deezer Elite lossless audio streaming "was a real ear opener."

The major vendors represented in the cyberManor Smart Home Experience Center include Lutron, Sonos, TiVo, Wisdom Audio, Kaleidescape, Dana Innovations, Nest, Roomie Remote, Cobalt Solar, ArtKick, and Samsung.

Some of the less traditional technologies (from an AV perspective) included the Lock State Connect keypad door lock, Mobotix intelligent front door camera station, a networked irrigation controller, iGrill BBQ monitoring temperature probe (alerts your phone when your meat is cooked to temp), Chamberlain MyQ automated garage door, and the Elertus wine cellar temperature and humidity monitor.

Aside from all the sales leads and constructive business interactions that occurred between partners, cyberManor now has a venue to support future targeted events, like watching San Francisco 49ers NFL games in an immersive, big-screen environment. All in all, it seems to be a winning formula.

—Lindsey Adler

Client Experiences Matter Most

More than half of the guests in attendance for cyberManor's Smart Home Experience Center were past clients, "which is great because we're always doing ongoing updates for them," Gordon van Zuiden said. He estimated that another 10 to 15 percent were vendor partners, interior designers, builders and architects, landscapers and gate control professionals. One key architect in the area told van Zuiden that he would be sending all of his clients there now. The firm is pursuing about 10 very active leads as a direct result of the open house.

The experience center not only serves as a venue to show off the latest high end home tech, but it's a prominent display of van Zuiden's controversial multi-app home concept.

The tough news delivered to URC dealers during CEDIA EXPO about Extra Vegetables illustrates van Zuiden's multi-app argument well. It's an example of relying on one company too much, he said, noting that it is a difficult path to sustain. Consumers today already function on a multi-app level with their devices anyway.

One important consideration is that there is a primary circle of apps that a homeowner would interact with in a multi-app home: lighting, audio, security, and temperature control. Multi-app does not mean dozens of apps to interact with every day; the concept can be implemented on a pretty simple level.