



# HOME THEATER SOLUTIONS

**A** home theater system can be as simple as a sound bar, a TV and a subwoofer speaker, or as complex as combining a home theater with a multi-room audio system in a house. A complex system like this would interconnect movies, music, television and the Internet. Whatever set-up you choose, a home theater adds excitement and pizzazz to viewing, including gaming – an activity that never ceases to be fun, even for adults.

Troy Dinkel, a West Lafayette resident, has a brand new multi-room home theater system that was designed and programmed by Rodney Cowden and his team at Sound Advice Inc. in Lafayette. Cowden put in three separate systems that work together, explains Dinkel: A music system that has the capability to play all over the house, a surround-sound home theater system in the basement, and an additional set-up with Blu-ray and high definition TV, which can connect to the Internet in the upstairs portion of the house.

"So, for instance, say I am in my master bathroom, and I want to listen to what is on ESPN—that feeds into the bathroom," Dinkel says. "I can also listen to any music source. It's impressive how well Rodney integrated them all." And, these choices—music, TV, movies—are available for listening in any room in the house. Cowden also integrated the games, Xbox and Wii into the set-up.

"Our family loves it," says Dinkel. "We just had a

bunch of our little cousins in the house, visiting from Colorado, and they were playing on the Wii on the big screen. It's one of the magic components of the house."

A multi-room set-up such as Dinkel's is similar to making a significant home improvement in money and time. A more complex home theater system can cost upwards of \$10,000, but Cowden explains the result simulates the movie theater experience with every detail.

"And the projects that we do, some of these home theaters, transcend the commercial theater, equal to—and sometimes beyond—what their experience is at the movies," Cowden says.

When people create a home theater, they want to have what the industry calls the "wow factor," which is the surround sound—the thump and the rumble that you get in a commercial theater, Cowden adds.

The sound is often the defining factor in home theater.

"Surround sound allows the sound to encompass the entire room, giving you the sounds in the background, so if there is a glass breaking off stage in a back office, you would hear that sound in the direction it came from," explains Joe Pitty, executive team leader on the sales floor at the Lafayette Target store.

Surround sound can be accomplished in a number of ways, including something simple, known as

a sound bar. A sound bar, made by such well-known manufacturers as Samsung, Yamaha, and Panasonic, can be purchased starting at around \$299 at large retailers such as HH Gregg. The equipment for a sound bar consists of a strip, which looks similar to a DVD player, and usually a wireless subwoofer speaker, which can be placed anywhere in a room, explains Gerard Tohill, a home theater specialist at the Lafayette HH Gregg.

These two pieces of equipment that make up the sound bar create the surround sound effect, or a similar effect to having five to seven speakers in a room. The sound bar is especially good for small rooms, or rooms that don't have a lot of open spaces, which would obstruct sound quality.

"In the perfect setting, a sound bar will work well," notes Tohill. The wireless subwoofer that comes with the sound bar processes low-frequency sound. The sound bar can be hooked into many types of televisions.

Another popular home theater solution is the HTIB, or Home Theater in a Box, which it literally is. Just about everything you need to set up a home theater comes in one box and most are wired, not wireless. These are also made by major manufacturers such as Bose, and the benefit of setting up an HTIB is usually its simplicity, Tohill says.

HTIBs have Blu-ray players, and can connect directly to such companies as Netflix and Vudu, which gives the viewer the ability to download and watch movies instantly, explains Bill Emery, store manager at the Lafayette HH Gregg. HTIBs are priced at around \$299 through about \$799.

While the right sound creates the home theater, it is only one part of the mix, says Tohill. The television screen provides the viewing experience and the technologies

of plasma, LCD and LED make viewing seem more

futuristic than ever before. LCD has a more matte appearance, while plasma and LED have more contrast, Tohill says. Tube televisions are generally a thing of the past: Most large retailers just sell flat screens now.

"I have never experienced television like this before" is a comment that Tohill often hears from customers who have set up a home theater, complete with the audio and high-definition video. "What most people forget is that the whole HD experience consists of not only the television, but the home theater," he adds.

3D viewing is perhaps the newest technology and hasn't produced a flurry of buying, primarily because of the price and the confusion that you have to wear the 3D glasses or the picture is blurry, which is a misconception, notes Chris Calloway at the Lafayette HH Gregg. Without the glasses, 3D can be viewed in normal two-dimensional television with a very crisp picture.

Not to be overlooked in setting up a home theater is ease of use, Cowden says. A system that is too complicated to control will sit idle. In order to facilitate using a home theater, large retailers also are helping customers to downsize to, yes, only one remote, or what is known as a universal remote control with macro functionality. The technology allows one remote to handle multiple components of the home theater system, even if those components, such as the TV and the speakers, are made by different manufacturers.

Aside from the sophisticated technology that is emerging all of the time, home theater provides convenience and ease of entertainment.

"An awful lot of people like to do this because they may have several children at home. Others don't like to go out where there are large crowds, and then the cost of going to the movies, with concessions, is much more than they want to spend, and they view home theater as a good investment over the long run," says Cowden.

And often, the experience is better than going out.

"Just yesterday, I had someone looking at a TV, and he said, 'That's better than when I saw this movie in IMAX,'" Tohill says. ❖

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