

I thought it might be a good time to send out a state of the industry message to all our clients and friends. As you might imagine, improvements in home electronic products come fast and furious. Its hard to keep up, even for someone like me who reads every periodical available, and works day to day in this industry. - Dallas

Front Projection TV

Since the first time I experienced a 6-foot front projection TV. I knew that "really" big screens were the way to get the most out of any kind of television programming or software. (Typically a projection TV is a small projector on the ceiling or floor and a large screen mounted on a wall.)

I used to think that most TV programming was bad, but as it turned out it was just too small! The larger screen allows for a much more compelling and exciting viewing experience, even "Charmin" commercials are interesting. In particular, sports like football are better than sitting on the 50 yard line! That was in 1979, now almost a quarter of a century later the products are much, much better. In addition, the prices are substantially lower and the reliability is now nearly "bulletproof".

I am sure most everyone has seen larger screen rear projectors at Best Buy etc. The largest of these self-contained products is around 65 (measured diagonally). The typical screen we use with popular front projectors is more like 110". This is actually three times the surface area of 65" set. It is impossible to convey to you in words how much of a difference that is, but suffice it to say, its a giant step forward. As a personal testimonial I find myself having to be careful about my viewing habits as it is very hard to turn one of these systems off!!

Recently, with the addition of HDTV (high definition TV), it has actually become more important to have a larger screen as the picture gets better the larger it gets. I have seen a 16 foot by 9 foot HDTV picture on a front projector that could have been easily mistaken for film. In contrast to that, before HDTV and DVDs became available, increasing the screen size usually increased the visibility of distortions, with many people complaining that front projectors looked "foggy". Believe me, that is not the case anymore. In my opinion, this technology offers the "ultimate" home viewing experience. As a side benefit, many of our client's have indicated that their children stay closer to home when a HDTV front projector has been installed.

Prices for HDTV front projectors start at \$3000. Even these lower priced models provide results that would outperform many \$15,000 projectors from a few years ago.

The only "issue" with front projectors is that they require a light controlled environment. Basements make an ideal location, although we have installed many of these in family rooms. High quality "black out" curtains are highly recommended.

Of course, we like to combine a video system like this with a multi channel surround system. Sweet! If you are like us from Minnesota, you will appreciate the fact that the total cost of one these systems is typically less than many fishing or sport boats (maybe just the motor!). The boat tends to sit in the garage or at the dock a good portion of the time, front projection systems get used most every day. Really fun stuff and a great entertainment value!

HDTV Whats on, you say?

Lately I find it difficult to watch standard broadcast television.

I have been spoiled by high definition programming.

In just the past few weeks, I have seen the likes of the Masters golf tournament, NCAA Final Four, NBA basketball, NHL hockey (How about them Wild!!), Major League baseball and much, much more. It is without question a better viewing experience than actually being at the event (In my humble opinion). Not

to mention the beverages and snacks are more delicious and far less expensive!!

Switching back to conventional NTSC picture quality makes you wonder if something went wrong with your TV.

The fix is more HDTV sources.

This is going to be a big year for HDTV.

We will see lots of additional programming like ESPN HD, Cinemax HD, Discovery Channel HD, and HDnet movies. This is all in addition to HBO HD, Showtime HD, HDnet Sports, CBS, ABC, NBC, PBS and WB programming already on the schedule. Yeah!!

After 25 years of watching small enhancements of the good old NTSC (the basic TV broadcasting quality), I still found it difficult to achieve a level of performance that's looks pleasing and realistic - particularly on larger screens. Now HDTV with the 6 times improvement in resolution, makes any size screen looks absolutely fabulous. I really like 110 inch diagonal wide-screen projection systems.

Feel free to call for more information. Bring on more HDTV.

Improved Products & Pricing: Plasma TV

In the last few years, we have seen a huge increase in the sales and installations of "super thin" flat panel displays. The typical depth of one of these, when mounted, is as amazing 4" thin. This is the first display technology I have seen that is acceptable to both electronics experts and interior designers. An unusual "win, win" situation!! (There may be some gender specific idiosyncrasies here, but I am not going to bring it up!!).

The dominant technology used in these products is called "**Plasma**". Its pretty complex, but its a bit like using millions of very, very tiny 3-color fluorescent lamps spread out on flat surface. Another technology, called "LCD", is also available, although more common in smaller TV sizes (13" to "20").

Plasmas start in size at 32" (measured diagonally) and go all the way to 63". A few years ago, as the product was beginning to be initially introduced, the picture quality was somewhat dim and lacked the contrast or "zing" that I was used to with conventional products. In addition, the prices started in the stratosphere, at around \$10,000.

Somewhat to my surprise, however, we still found people would purchase them at that price, as they could easily fit into an unusual space, such as above the mantle on a fireplace. Not to mention, of course, that they EXUDED the cache value of being "super cool".

Well currently (now several generations later), we are looking at Plasma displays that outperform conventional TVs. Perhaps even more importantly, the prices have been reduced significantly, now starting at under \$4000. I would say if you want to buy the best 42" or 50" display on the market it has to be a plasma product.

In addition, the latest Plasma models will display the full capabilities of the HDTV system. This means Extremely Sharp Pictures!! And from a technical perspective, Plasma TVs are inherently perfectly focused with little or no drifting as they age (unlike older style projection TVs).

As mentioned, the "LCD" technology is popular in smaller displays. Prices starting under \$500 They fit in easily under the kitchen cabinet or in the bath. One big advantage to LCD is life expectancy. Its many times that of conventional Television products. If you are thinking about a new TV, be sure to consider these exciting new technologies.

TIVO

I have been thinking about a personal video recorder (otherwise know as a PVR) for my home system for quite sometime now. After installing several Tivo brand recorders, I finally made the move and set one up with my existing Directv satellite receiver; although, if you have cable, it can be configured to control their boxes also.

What this device can do to improve your home television viewing is at the very least revolutionary. Of course, we all have had the capability of recording a show while watching others or setting up recordings for weeks in advance using our existing video tape recorders. BUT, What Tivo does is take away the need to program anything (or set the clock!) even the process of choosing programs is handled by the sophisticated software.

For example, if I tune in a "Star Trek" episode and, while I am watching, click on the "thumbs up" button, from that point forward, the Tivo will record shows like Star Trek for you. It does not get any easier than that.

In addition you can very easily set up what are called "Season Passes" which will record a favorite show every time it is on. It even knows if it is a repeat, avoiding episodes you have already seen.

Personally, I have been recording "Six feet under", "Conan O'Brien", and several other regularly scheduled programs. I rarely watch live programming anymore, as a matter of fact, Tivo will record a show while you are watching another recording. Awesome!

Another feature is the ability to fast forward through several minutes of programming in just a few seconds. I am sure the networks are not too excited about this as it allows you to fast forward through any recorded commercial in no time. A hour long "Star Trek" only takes 40 minutes to watch. Much, much better!

If you are watching a "live" event, the recorder will allow you to pause the show during common interruptions, like phone calls and making popcorn, and you never miss a thing.

Using a product like this makes me think that the future of home viewing is going to have to be something along these lines. It is a major improvement in time spent with the television. A new HDTV Tivo is due out this fall. High Resolution Tivo. Wow! . Highly recommended.

I hope this gives everyone some insight into the current home electronic trends. We actually find it to be kind of fun. We hope this shows in our work. We also know that most of business comes from referrals, so I would like to thank everyone for your continued support. I will, as usual, be available as much as possible. So if you have any questions, feel free to call anytime. I can easily be reached on my mobile phone. My number is 612 868 6129. We have found that many problems are usually resolved quickly and easily over the phone.

One last thing; if you do give us a referral that generates new business. We have some Neat New Supercalibrations shirts that could make a nice reward. OK, I know some of you deserve one already.

Give me a call for further discussion.

Thanks again for all of your business Dallas

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