



"Welcome to Volume 7 of our newsletter. It's another New Year with prices dropping and TV picture size and quality increasing! Our fun and exciting industry makes our life always interesting. Thank you for your support."

Price Avalanche!

It seems inflation hasn't affected the home electronics industry.

Having just returned from the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, I will confirm the mantra for this event to be "Bigger, Better and Cheaper". Not officially, but since last year's CES, prices for many products have dropped 30 to 40 percent!

I cannot recall a more dramatic average price decrease in my 30+ years in the industry. The most drastic change has been in television products. Plasma and LCD's battle it out for the "flat panel" market. I can recall selling an early 50" plasma display for \$15,000 a few years ago. Now, \$2500 will buy a much better product! New 52" LCD Sony flat panels went from \$7000 to \$5000 -one month after being introduced! Even Home Theater "front projection" products have felt "pressure" to significantly reduce cost, while improving quality.

For example, 3 years ago, Sony introduced the Qualia 004. It is a "1920 by 1080" (highest quality HD picture) projector for \$30,000. Last year the nearly equivalent VPL-VW100 ("Ruby") came out at \$10,000. Shortly thereafter the very similar VPL -VW50 ("Pearl") was released at \$5000!

Holy Smokes! This is an unbelievable improvement in price to performance ratio. I would suggest most people have never seen picture quality at this level from any television regardless of size! Consumer delight!

This is a great time to consider a new TV. Of course, if you still crave being an early adopter, there is money to be spent. Panasonic includes delivery and set-up with their 103" High Resolution (1920 by 1080) Plasma for a mere \$69,000. My understanding is Shaquille O'Neal has one on order.

The lower prices should make it easier to add surround sound and remote systems for the full blown Media Room Experience. Please call for more information. We offer competitive pricing and you will love our customer service!

Decorators & Audiophiles

Everyone loves great sounding music and movies at home. Most everyone would prefer the loudspeakers required for this process be virtually invisible. Imagine a beautiful interior space filled with gorgeous sound. What could be better?

Ok, ok, ok, there are a few of us who hanker for refrigerator-sized behemoths thumping out big sound while dominating giant chunks of floor space. (Hey, that actually sounds like good name for a loudspeaker line: "The Dominators".)

Enter "Flush Mount" or "In Wall" loudspeakers. Using the same high quality components as the previously mentioned "big box" designs, "in walls" can use almost any wall cavity as its cabinet, leaving only the "face" visible. Painting the exposed section to match the wall, allows for a nearly magical disappearing act. I have even seen "Faux" painted versions! We have a pretty good example of this "blending" in our demonstration facility. Feel free to swing by and discover how great sound can be produced in a very discreet way.

These unobtrusive designs really shine when combined with an "in wall" subwoofer.

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Subwoofers produce the bass or “thunder” of a sound system, and they usually require a large cabinet. Fortunately, several manufacturers have introduced innovative products that are actually designed to fit into a typical stud space.

As with their smaller “in wall” cousins, only the “face” is visible. As you might have suspected, now a nicely decorated family room can sound better than your local cinema!

I thought it would never happen, but it would seem Decorators and Audiophiles can live together in harmony! Could World Peace be far behind?

iPod-o-phile

I recently purchased an iPod. You are probably thinking. “What the heck has he been waiting for?” Well, I have always felt that, while “the space -saving music compression techniques” (MP3, AAC etc), used with iPods, come very close to the sound of the original CD, the results are not quite good enough to use as “audiophile” source material.

I really like to “stretch the legs” of the audio systems we install, so I usually bring along an assortment of uncompressed CD’s to put loudspeakers through some difficult paces.

So, I was pleased to discover recently that Apple had introduced an 80-gigabyte iPod. This larger hard drive can store 1000’s of songs with out any of the previously mentioned sonic compromises.

Using a compression system called “Apple Lossless”, which saves space (about half) when compared to the original, iPod’s remain sonically at “CD” quality. Sweet!

I found I could “rip” about 300 CD’s to the 80 gig iPod using “Lossless”. Wow! Now I have my entire unaltered CD collection in a device that fits in my shirt pocket!

It is worth noting that it does takes a few minutes to convert each CD to “lossless” and store it on your computer. The overall process took several days for me to complete.

In addition, I highly recommend using an secondary hard drive device to back up your files. Catastrophic failures of hard drives can and will occur. Murphy’s law seems to apply with all things computer. If you are not up to the task, “ripping” services are available. Call for more details.

Another surprise came when I plugged the iPod into my home audio system. It actually sounded better than the 400 -disc changer I had been using! Upon further research, I found Apple uses a well-respected “Wolfson” Digital to Analog converter in their newest iPod. Now I am starting to get excited! Even a critical music lover would enjoy the results from this tiny device.

It would now be appropriate to use an iPod as your primary music “server”. In fact, many “whole house” audio systems allow you to simply drop an iPod into a “docking station” for instant access to all your tunes.

One of our favorite companies, “Niles Audio”, has a new multi-room system called ICS. This new design has “display” keypads as an option for each room. Control of the iPod from the Master Bath is now exactly the same as having it with you. This compares favorably to much more expensive “Media Servers” previously preferred for whole house music distribution.

iPod docks and accessories can be used with any existing audio system, as well.

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Kudos to Apple for their great little gizmo! We are now "iPod-o-philes". Why not call for more information...

HIGH-DEF PROGRAMMING IS GETTING A LOT BETTER! (Again)

The only complaint coming from new owners of HD Televisions has been the limited supply of Higher Resolution TV programs to watch (not to mention show off to their friends).

DirecTv comes to the rescue! They will offer 100 new High Definition channels this year. Yeah!!

Early entries on the list include:

A & E
Bravo
Cartoon Network
CNN
Food Network
FX
HGTV
MTV
National Geographic
NFL Network
Sci-Fi Channel
Speed Channel
TBS
History Channel
Weather Channel
USA Network
Many regional sports networks including FSN North are included
Local HD network (CBS, Fox, ABC, NBC) are up-linked as well.

That's a great start!

If you are already a DirecTv subscriber, you will

probably need to upgrade your equipment to receive these channels.

Feel free to call for more information.

Plasma or LCD?

It was just a couple of years ago that I wrote an article, similarly titled, for our newsletter. It seems appropriate to cover this flat panel "competition" again, as things have really been heating up.

Plasma and LCD technologies both have pluses and minuses. LCD's, for example, have a very slight lag when motion occurs, producing a slight blur during fast action sequences. Recently, Sony and others have drastically reduced this "lag" in new models; however, since Plasma displays do not exhibit any lag to speak of, the advantage goes to them.

In brightly lit rooms, Plasma devices tend to reflect light off their glass front panels. LCD's have non-glare front panels - along with somewhat higher brightness capabilities. In sunrooms, for example, LCD TV's definitely have the edge.

Reproduction of darker scenes or "Black Level" was a serious weakness in LCD panels a few years ago. Picture quality tended towards a "washed out" look. Recent improvements in panel and backlight design have all but eliminated these concerns. It's also true that Plasma manufacturers have made their own improvements, so they still hold the edge in black level performance.

Life Expectancy for both LCD and Plasma TV's is around 60,000 hours. If you averaged 2000 hours of TV viewing a year, each would last for 30 years!

Both designs can provide the maximum resolution available for HD viewing: 1920 by 1080 pixels.

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There seems to be a few more LCD models to choose from in this "top of the line" (Full High Definition) category. I will wager, however; that in the near future, most displays will be "Full HD".

As mentioned elsewhere in the newsletter, prices on all displays are much lower than even a few months ago. Price to performance is at an all time high! As usual, however, a little deliberation is required to make a quality buying decision. We are glad to help in any way we can!

Have a Great Spring!

From everyone at Supercalibrations

I hope this gives everyone some insight into the current home electronic trends. We actually find it to be great fun. We hope it shows in our work. We also know that most of our business comes from referrals. We would like to thank everyone for their continued support. We promise to stay committed to being the best in the business.

I will (as usual) be available as much as possible. So if you have any questions, feel free to call anytime. My number is 612-868-6129. We have found that many problems are usually resolved quickly and easily over the phone. I'm always available for further discussion.

One last thing; if you do give us a referral that generates new business, we have a new program to provide a few perks to your own home entertainment system. They make a nice reward for giving us a recommendation. Thanks again for your business!

- Dallas

Contact Information

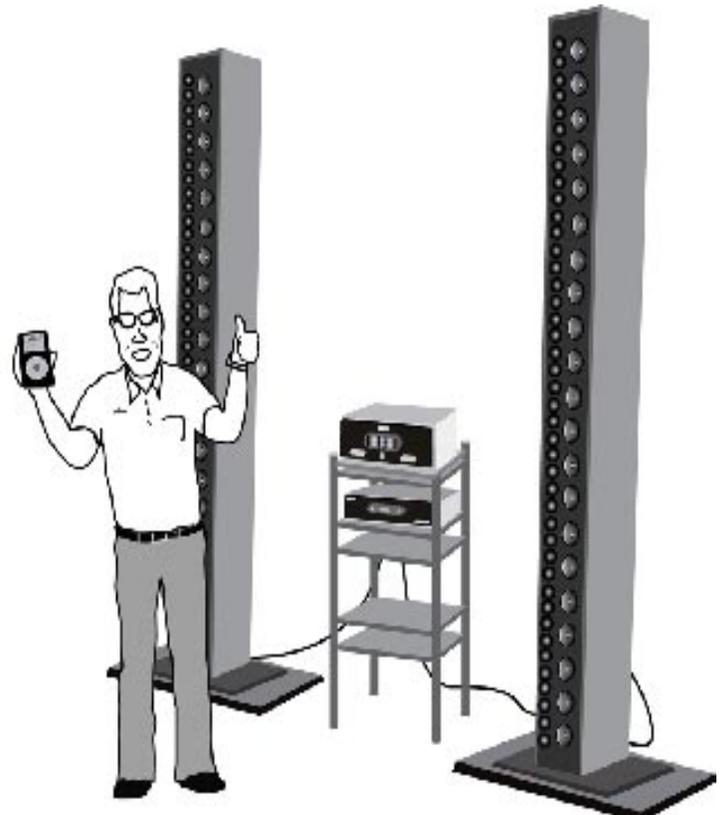
Office Phone **Office Fax**
651.777.5444 651.773.9393

Dallas Dingle - C.E.O. , Sales
612.868.6129 - *mobile*

Mike Dooley - Managing Director
612.961.4774 - *mobile*

Nate DeChene - Senior Project Manager
651.775.6441 - *mobile*

Scott Ingvaldson - Senior Project Manager
612.801.6664 - *mobile*



Dallas is now a certified iPod-o-phile !