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Guide to
Home Automation
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David Frangioni, Audio One, in his
North Miami Beach, Fla. studio and office

Neat-O!

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A little friendly competition to boost your game. For Lexington, S.C.-based integrator Elite Audio and three other area installers, the kindness frequently extends to weekly lunches where they can talk shop, industry, technology ... and dealing with cleanup work. That friendly competition even provides referrals on such projects, as was the case with this Neat-O job in Myrtle Beach, according to Elite Audio president Brantley Waites.

"We have kind of an alliance with three other local dealers, and we learned about this project back at the end of last summer because one of those competitors referred us to the customer," says Waites, noting that Jim Dewitt of nearby Legends Security and Sound provided the lead because of Elite Audio's experience installing Crestron.

NEATO! TIPS

■ Bad apples like this are terrible for the industry, says Elite Audio's Brantley Waites. Leave the customer with good impressions and be honest with them. "If a customer is willing to spend this kind of money on a project, we need them flowing through our industry to survive, and unfortunately a large part of our business is cleaning up work."

■ Your name's important, so don't be afraid to take a loss if it makes a project better. "We'll sacrifice profit sometimes to avoid an inferior final result. We survive on our name and word of mouth and don't market much at all, and we've been in our current location since 1996."

"I've been in this business 22 years, and this was one of the worst I've seen," Waites says of what the homeowners told him was originally a \$250,000 project.

Just how awful was it? The installation began in May 2006 and was only "partly working" in December 2008, according to the homeowner. By April 2009 the equipment and wiring looked as they did in the "before" pictures, and the distributed audio system played inconsistently from day to day. And, sadly, that was better than how the distributed video system performed — the owners could not select or switch any of the video sources or satellite channels from their touchpanels or keypads. Of course,

because the equipment was centralized in a closet rack (the purpose of having integrated systems, right?), that meant any time they wanted to change channels or go from satellite to DVD they had to walk to the closet and manually switch.

Rather than try and decipher the mess — the "before" wiring was a pretty good indication — Elite Audio decided essentially to work from scratch. Waites, Anthony Kelly and Brantley's brother Reid Waites re-installed everything, except for pulling all the wire out of the walls, over a two-week span to give the owners a new system.

"We didn't spend a bunch of time trying to diagnose what was wrong, we just gutted the equipment and started over," Brantley says. "We removed the rack, disassembled all the rack components and cabling, removed all point-A-to-point-B wiring and re-labeled everything, pulled every control panel out of the wall and basically wired and verified the integrity to all of our specifications."

That included identifying every cable in the mix of Cresnet, Ethernet, speaker wire and coax, and properly extending them unlike the integrator that had under-compensated the measuring during the original install.

Brantley took care of re-programming the Crestron controls, and in the end the



systems actually worked. It brought the wife to tears after nearly three years of headache, and it brought in \$17,000 and invaluable customer service cred to Elite Audio. —Arlen Schweiger

Congratulations to Elite Audio for a Neat-O! installation. We're looking for over-the-top projects. Cool, unique, tidy or meticulous, share your best work with our readers. E-mail your submissions, with high-resolution images, to managing editor Arlen Schweiger at aschweiger@ehpub.com.