

TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

Building the Workforce to Service the Digital Home

The digital home industry is booming. Builders are including structured wiring as standard. Whole-house audio, home theater, computer networks, surveillance cameras, and security systems are becoming the norm. Current sales and projections for digital home products and systems show double-digit growth. The question is, who can install all of this technology and make it work correctly? The need for a workforce to service the digital home is paramount.

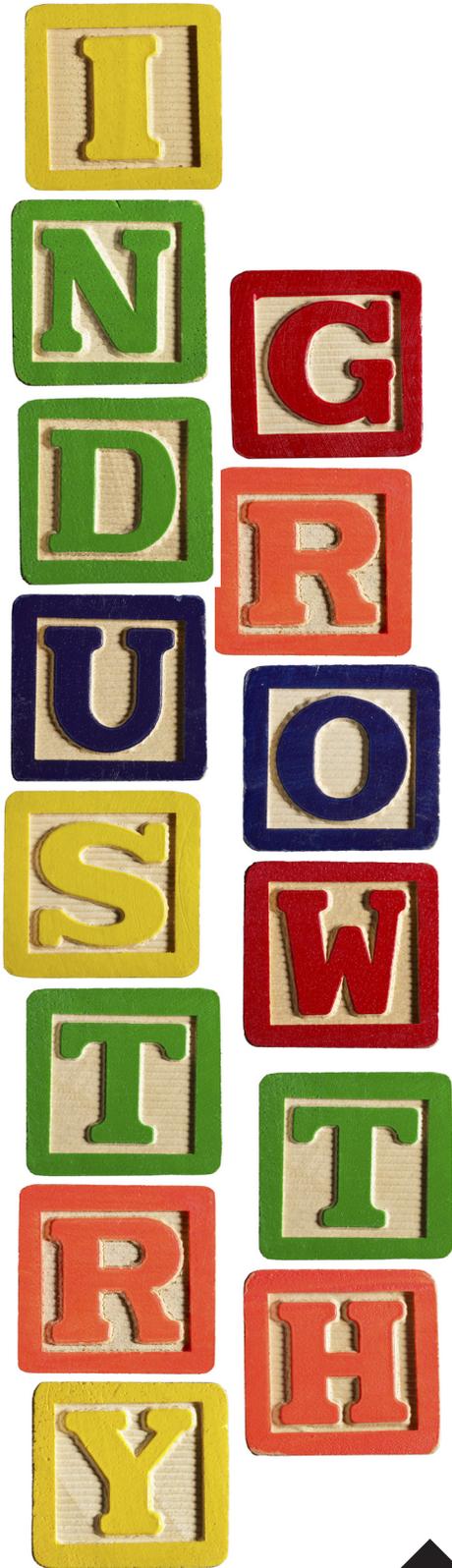
Many tout a plug-and-play world for installation. Granted, products have improved dramatically in performance and reliability over the past decade, yet today installation still requires a trained and qualified technician. This skill set differs from that of the traditional wire installer, the electrician. There is now a fourth contractor trade serving the industry alongside the electrical, plumbing, and HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) professionals. The person performing this work in the field is the electronic systems technician (EST). The advanced setup, programming and ongoing support are delivered by a home technology integrator (HTI), a trained and certified professional installing and servicing residential technology systems in the home.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES GROW

As the need and demand for training are recognized, opportunities for training increase with numerous alternatives from a variety of sources. With the complexity and options in many products offered today, and the integration of products with each other, manufacturers are offering more and more training. They have expanded training from the traditional live presentations given at industry events, local distributors around the country, and road shows. Additional choices for training now include webinars and online courses. Technical schools are starting to offer training in technology for the home, most often in a classroom setting with lectures and hands-on labs. Training companies are entering the industry with online training and live workshops. Publishers are releasing books covering the technology, the business aspects of the industry such as project management, and industry certifications.

RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION

Industry associations, product manufacturers and independent companies are validating knowledge and skills with different kinds of recognition. These acknowledgements can inspire confidence from business partners and potential customers, and can be a valuable differentiator in a highly competitive market. Both contractors and homeowners, along with home technology companies, desire to have a common frame-of-reference that verifies the training and knowledge of technicians. Industry certifications are emerging to help identify the qualified and competent people in the market.



CEDIA OFFERS NUMEROUS CERTIFICATIONS

The first of three key initiatives for certification in the residential technology installation industry is CEDIA Professional Certification. CEDIA, the Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association at www.chedia.com is a non-profit international trade association that focuses on the planning and installation of residential electronic systems. The CEDIA Professional Certification program includes; Installer Level I, Installer Level II, Designer, and Home Theater Design Specialist.

COMPTIA PREPARES FOR THE DIGITAL HOME

CompTIA, the Computer Technology Industry Association at www.comptia.org is a non-profit global trade association promoting industry standards, professional expertise, skills education, and relevant business solutions to the information technology industry. CompTIA is the sponsor of A+, Network+, and the recently updated DHTI+ certification exams. The DHTI+ certification is a result of the regularly scheduled update for CompTIA HTI+ (Home Technology Integrator) certification exam and the Consumers Electronics Association (CEA) working together to serve a shared need among the members of each association. That need is rooted in the capabilities of the digital systems within the home. With the infusion of information technology (IT) into consumer electronic products, digital systems have become more popular than ever before, and so the "D" for digital was added to the certification name.

ESPA TAKES THE INITIATIVE

The third initiative is the recently formed group ESPA, the Electronic Systems Professional Alliance. The founding partners of the alliance are CEA, CEDIA, and NSCA, the National Systems Contractors Association. ESPA is open to organizations joining the alliance as affiliates, with the goal of working together to communicate with a unified voice in the electronics systems industry. ESPA's vision is to delivery high-quality education and credible certification products universally recognized as the path to a career in electronic systems contracting. ESPA expects to launch education and certification products in the fourth quarter of 2007. Certification will be indicated by the designation Certified-EST.

NEXT STEPS

With the increased offerings of technology for the home and the rapid growth in the number of companies providing installation and services, training is essential. Certification validates the knowledge and skill set of the technician and can establish comfort and trust with the customer. With a trained workforce the market can be served accurately and efficiently. Everyone involved will benefit from training and industry recognized certification.

CERTIFICATION BENEFITS for the employer and homeowner:

- Verified skills of job candidates simplifies recruitment and hiring
- Reduced entry-level training costs
- Measurable job performance and competency standards
- Increased customer satisfaction and repeat and follow-up business
- Reduced warranty repair work and costs
- Increased competitive advantage over companies without certified technicians

CERTIFICATION BENEFITS for the technician:

- Proof of his or her professional achievement and knowledge
- Clear career path
- Improved job opportunities
- Foundation for additional higher-level certifications

