

READY NET GO ... NEWS

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Tip of the Month

Clean up your hard drive

- 1) Run **anti-spyware** software **REGULARLY** – every week or every day if you browse the web. Delete any items found – this simple task cannot be overstated. Highly rated programs include:
 - a. Lavasoft's AdAware (free for personal use);
 - b. Webroot's Spy Sweeper;
 - c. PC Tool's Spyware Doctor
 - d. Grisoft's AVG Anti-Spyware

2) **Delete Cookies and Temporary Internet Files**

In Internet Explorer 6.0:

Click **Tools**, scroll down to **Internet Options...**

On the General Tab, click the buttons **Delete Cookies** and **Delete Files**. It may take a few minutes if you haven't done this in awhile.

In Netscape 8.0 and higher:

Click **Tools**, scroll down to **Options...**

Click the Privacy tab. If you want to delete all traces of your online activity, click the **Clear** button at the top of the page. Otherwise, click the **Clear** button next to each item especially for **Cookies** and **Cache**.

In Firefox:

Click **Tools**, scroll down to **Options ...**

Click the **Privacy** button at the top then the Cache tab. Click the **Clear Cache Now...** button. Click the Cookies tab and then click the **Clear Cookies Now** button.

Home Theater – Part 2

Speakers, Receivers, DVD and more

In last month's newsletter, we discussed high definition TVs and how they fit into a home theater system. For this month's newsletter, we'll discuss everything else from speakers to lighting and everything in between.

Home Theater Options

There are basically two options in purchasing a system: buy an all inclusive system called a "Home Theater in a Box" (HTiB) or purchase individual components for a custom system.

HTiB – Home Theater in a Box – the "simple" way to get a cinema quality movie experience. An HTiB includes at least 5 speakers for surround sound, an amplifier for the speakers, and an audio/video receiver that: 1) decodes TV signals; 2) provides remote features; and 3) allows multiple devices such as DVD players and VCR's to connect to your TV. Some HTiB systems include a DVD player in the receiver while others omit this feature. Everything is usually well color coded so putting the cables in the right place is a breeze. Simply connect your TV to the receiver, position the speakers and you're set!

If you're interested in purchasing an HTiB in addition to a widescreen TV, consider purchasing both from the same manufacturer. That way, you're almost assured that the remote will work with all components. (Note: Lower end models may not be as compatible as higher end components.)

WWW (Websites Worth Watching)

- 1) www.consumerreports.com – Online or magazine – you can't go wrong with this handy reference tool.
- 2) www.consumersearch.com – Website that reviews the reviews – nicely condensed with links to original articles.
- 3) www.tivo.com – Learn more about TiVo
- 4) www.crutchfieldadvisor.com – Great info on stereo and home theater components.

Tips on Choosing an HTiB

The most important component in an HTiB is the speakers. Speaker cable that ships with HTiBs is usually 18AWG or 16AWG. Upgrade to 14AWG or 12AWG for improved sound quality. Secondly, check the inputs – make sure you match your electronic devices to the controller's ports. For example, if you have a progressive scan DVD player, you'll want a controller/receiver that has component video inputs rather than composite or s-video inputs. Lastly, decide on the type of digital signal you want. The surround-sound signal is the key component in the overall sound/visual experience. Go with Dolby Digital if you will only play DVDs and you want the highest quality multi-channel experience. If you still have VHS movies and want to watch general analog TV programs through the system (at least for the next two years), go with Dolby Pro Logic II.

Other Home Theater Components

Connections

Inputs and outputs are important considerations for all electronic equipment – it's how all of your devices "fit" together and either can make or break your setup. Make sure the devices you purchase have complementary ports and enough ports to satisfy your current as well as future needs.

Two important ports are **HDMI** (high definition media interface) and **DVI** (digital video input). They both transfer signals digitally rather than the traditional analog way. HDMI has an advantage in that it supports both video and audio while DVI only transfers video. Both HDMI and DVI are replacing composite and S-video connections which are purely analog.

If you are moving to a high definition setup, make sure the equipment you purchase has HDMI or DVI ports. (You can get HDMI or DVI adapters if in the future you need a cable connection you don't have). Keep in mind that many devices don't ship with cables. An HDMI cable costs at least \$30.



HDMI connector (left)

DVI connector (right)

Speakers

You can choose three different surround sound formats: 5.1 (5 speakers & subwoofer), 6.1 (6-7 speakers & subwoofer) or 7.1 (7 speakers & subwoofer). For an excellent diagram of these options see, <http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/home-theater5.htm>. Speakers can make or break a system so weigh cost vs. quality closely. If you buy components separately, make sure that the speakers and receiver are compatible in watts produced. Also, make sure that the speaker cable length is as short as possible. If you run speaker wire longer than 50 ft, purchase a lower gauge wire (e.g., 12AWG or 14AWG). Lower gauge wire is thicker and provides less resistance over long runs.

Receivers/Amplifiers

Similar to stereo receivers used for music, a home theater receiver/amplifier powers the speakers, enables you to switch between your audio and video devices, and also provides the decoding necessary for multi-channel surround sound. The main difference between a stereo receiver and a home theater receiver is that only **home theater** receivers offer **digital** inputs. So if you want to listen to your CDs in high resolution, you'll need a receiver that offers SACD (Super Audio CD) or DVD-audio formats. For more info, visit: http://www.crutchfieldadvisor.com/learningcenter/home/cd_dvdsacd.html

Some receivers now offer multi-room capabilities. For instance, some receivers can allow one person to watch a movie in the living room and another person can listen to music in a bedroom at the same

time. If this concept seems interesting, look into dual room/dual source receivers. Finally, unless you're looking for a concert hall environment, look for a receiver/amplifier that provides 80 – 100 watts per channel. This will be sufficient for most people for listening to music and watching movies.

TIP: Receivers have an integrated AM/FM tuner whereas amplifiers do not.

DVD players

A multitude of options are available for watching movies. Standard single disc or 5 disc players that support surround sound are popular and relatively inexpensive now. Some things to look for: smooth scan feature, ability to play MP3, JPEG, home made movies (DVD-R, DVD+RW, etc.) and CDs, Dolby digital or DTS decoding if you will be connecting the player to your surround sound speakers (if you will just use your TV speakers this isn't important) and HDMI or component video ports.

If you want more functionality than a standard DVD player, look for one that is **upconverting** (you can also purchase upconverting receivers). This feature will be able to take advantage of some of the HDTV features in your new TV. Nearly all DVDs are produced in SDTV rather than HDTV. By purchasing an upconverting DVD player, **the player will increase the resolution of the disc to the TV you have**. Keep in mind that an upconverting DVD player will not improve a standard DVD disc if you don't have an HD Television (although many people would jump at this technological breakthrough). So if you aren't planning on purchasing an HD TV, skip the upconverting DVD player and just go with a standard DVD player/recorder.

1) Blu-ray vs. HD-DVD

If you're looking for the latest technology, there are two competing formats for **HDTV DVD players: Blu-ray and HD-DVD**. The formats are **incompatible** in that an HD-DVD disc cannot be played in a Blu-ray player and vice versa. At this time, you'll have to choose a format and stick with it (remember Betamax vs. VHS ...?!). Both formats offer DVD discs that are recorded at HDTV resolutions. With an HDTV player and a HDTV disc (and a HD TV), the picture quality is unsurpassed. Unfortunately, there is no standard yet – the industry isn't sure which one of these formats will win market share so if you can wait, do so. Although vendors are currently split now, this may change in the near future as consumers start embracing the technology. Both formats may find a niche eventually.

Blu-ray is supported by: Hitachi, Panasonic, Pioneer, Philips, Samsung, Sony, Sharp, HP, & Apple

HD-DVD is supported by: Toshiba, NEC, Sanyo, HP, & Microsoft

The selection of movies is increasing for both Blu-ray and HD DVD but the options are considerably less than standard DVDs. While Blu-ray seems to have support from the major players, it has many issues including higher costs and lower quality compared to HD DVD. HD DVD is closely aligned to the manufacturing process of standard DVDs which makes producing these discs less expensive. One advantage to Blu-ray is the higher storage capacity. A full length feature film can fit easily on a Blu-ray disc while HD-DVD discs may need to use both sides or include more than one disc in the package. Despite this, **HD DVD is currently leading in the format war** with higher sales and consumer support.

One last note, most **DVD discs** are created in Standard definition (**SDTV**) resolutions – 480p. So regular DVDs played on an HDTV set won't take full advantage of the TV's possible resolutions (unless you have an upconverting receiver or DVD player mentioned above). For now though, standard DVDs aren't going anywhere (cassette tapes and vinyl records are still being produced after all) and all **HD DVD players will be backwards compatible** so don't worry about purchasing standard DVDs. In the future, when the format war ends, you can always purchase your favorite movies in the new format.

2) DVD Recorders

Another option is to purchase a DVD recorder that can **create/record discs** in the DVD-R/RW or DVD+R/RW formats. Instead of taping your favorite show on VHS, burn the show on a DVD disc. Some DVD recorders are single format while others can record to either format. Eventually there will be HD-DVD recorders as well. Some DVD recorders will automatically tag commercials and skip them during playback similar to TiVo (see below).

DVR (Digital Video Recorders)

TiVo is a type of DVR and is truly revolutionary. It is similar to a computer in that it has a **hard drive** and an **operating system (Linux)** and allows you to record up to 300 hours of programming depending on the recorder and quality of video selected. If your VHS player is getting "old", TiVo will change your life. When you subscribe to TiVo you get a hardware device that records TV programs either through cable, satellite TV or even with a basic antenna. The service enables you to **pause live TV** and then catch up at your convenience. It also allows you, through their extensive menu options, to search for and record any program you want either in a single recording or all season long. You can also record to VHS tapes or DVD discs. The only thing you'll need to get started is a TV and a phone line (Phone line is needed to transmit setup information to the TiVo device. Future updates require a phone line or broadband connection.)

If you're ambitious and don't want to subscribe to the TiVo service, you can put together your own system with a **computer, TV tuner card** and **software**. Call our office for more information on setting up this system.

Surge Protection

For all stereo and video equipment, make sure you have the proper surge protection. **Surge protectors protect your equipment** from "noise" on the line and will prevent most damage caused by surges and spikes. Choose a surge protector that is rated for home electronics or measure the watts/amps of your devices and get a surge protector that will **comfortably handle the total amount** in the event of a disturbance.

Additional Items to Incorporate into Your Home Theater

Lighting

Lighting is an integral component of the true movie experience. Being able to dim the lights is a mood altering experience for many – signaling the "start of the show". Dimmers also allow you to customize the lighting depending on your audience. **Consider three types of lighting for the room:** task, accent, and ambient. **Task lighting** would be helpful for reading or fixing a loose cable; **accent lighting** is for decoration purposes – highlighting a piece of art or surrounding the TV when not in use; **ambient light** is for safety or effect filling in the corners of the room or providing lights on stairs or the floor. In configuring your setup, consider small tabletop lights or ambient floor lighting, directional "spots", and curtains to block out natural sunlight.

Theater seating

Many people choose sectional sofas for the most seating/lounging options but if you're looking for something different you can now get plush, full arm leather chairs that recline, move and vibrate with the on-screen action or the traditional straight-back chairs with lift-up seats. You're limited only in your imagination. Remember that the best seating is directly in front of the TV so plan your room accordingly – you may even want to put in a false floor for additional seating behind your primary seats just like at the movies! For ideas, check out: <http://www.hometheaterseating.com/> or <http://www.htmarket.com/>