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CEDIA Awards Issue

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London Calling

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Another Pretty Face

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Anytime, Anywhere

*Crestron's e-Control2
Facilitates Efficient
Remote Control*

by carolyn heinze

This year at CEDIA EXPO, Crestron was awarded the Best Home Networking Product Award for its e-Control 2 system, an updated version of the manufacturer's innovative e-Control technology. For "control freaks," this is good news indeed.

Based on Microsoft's ActiveX platform, e-Control 2 emulates a Crestron touch panel. Features include XPanel Web, which emulates Internet Explorer as it is displayed on a Crestron

sultants, programmers and custom installers that are creating touch panels on VT-Pro-e. This feature also allows these professionals to test touch panel designs from their own PCs before sending them to clients for approval.

"The heart of any well designed control system is the user interface, which provides the link between the end user and the control system," noted Jason Frenchman, Crestron's corporate

Crestron's product development team reasoned, so it makes sense to use this technology. "The widespread familiarity with the Microsoft platform means dealers can easily help their clients get comfortable using e-Control 2 to handle things like enabling their home security system when they forget, monitoring things at home like a babysitter or kids, or turning lights on and off," Frenchman pointed out.

While the first e-Control system was based



Crestron president George Feldstein (left) celebrates one of his company's two Manufacturer's Excellence awards with CEDIA EXPO 2003 MC Evan McBroom.

touch panel; Xpanel EXE, which allows operation from a Windows desktop; Xpanel PDA, the function that enables users to control their systems using a PDA or web tablet and Xpanel Emulator, a feature designed specifically for con-

communications director. "Regardless of how cleverly programmed or sophisticated a given system is, if it lacks a quality user interface, it is unlikely to be used to its full potential."

Everyone is familiar with Microsoft,

The role that PCs play in our everyday lives has dictated the need for Crestron to offer PC-based solutions

on Java, e-Control 2 uses ActiveX. "Thanks to ActiveX, Crestron e-Control 2 allows users to accurately and efficiently emulate any Crestron touch panel on Internet Explorer, which offers an ActiveX runtime environment, or as a stand-alone Windows-based runtime executable file that can be launched locally from the Windows desktop," Frenchman explained.

e-Control 2 uses COM technology that is designed for Microsoft Windows and Internet Explorer. "The purpose of e-Control 2 is to give e-Control Web pages (or stand-alone executables) the same look and feel as touch panel pages, with almost none of the overhead associated

with Java-based projects," Frenchman noted.

For dealers, e-Control 2's remote control capabilities often eliminate the need for an on-site service call.

"It allows us to access our customers' systems remotely, so we can make changes to performance diagnostics, which is great, because they can call us and report a problem, and we can diagnose or fix that problem from here," said John Clancy, vice president and partner at Audio Command Systems Inc., a custom installation firm based in Westbury, New York. "It's efficient,

and there is no need to schedule a service call."

e-Control 2 has made networking systems easier, Clancy noted. "Previously, if we were doing a large system, we had one processor that basically controlled everything, and sometimes it was taxing on the processor," Clancy explained. "What this allows us to do is put multiple processors in and link them all together." One processor may handle the lighting system, while another may be dedicated to other systems. "It decentralizes the processors, so if one system goes down, it doesn't affect everything."

The availability of PDA-based control is becoming popular among Clancy's clientele. "PDA control wasn't really happening until e-Control 2 came out—the same goes for Web tablets," he said. "A lot of our customers have seen that and are asking for it. They cost a lot less money than your average touch panel, and they give you all the features that a touch panel does, in addition to being able to send and receive email."

Dan Fulmer, president of FullTech Solutions, Inc., a custom installation company in Jacksonville, Florida, also touts e-Control 2's remote capabilities. "We can give clients the ability to control their house from anywhere in the world through the Internet," he said.



Fulmer believes that developments like e-Control 2 will assist in popularizing home automation in general. "When you are in your house, it's nice to control it, but when you are on your way home, it's even nicer to heat up the Jacuzzi, start the music, or just get the house ready for when they arrive," he said. "It's easy to use and easy to integrate. Nowadays, I would think that it would be one of the most common things people would want out of home automation."

The role that PCs play in our everyday lives has dictated the need for Creston to offer PC-based solutions, according to Fred Bargetzi, Creston's vice president of technology. "This is the future," he said. "In the last five years, practically every Creston processor supports the whole Ethernet or TCP/IP communications process. As the PC technology develops, we are not going to fight it; we're going to make devices that make up the infrastructure of your house. We're going to leverage the power of that infrastructure with things like e-Control 2 to let you use PCs, Web tablets, and PDAs to capitalize on what technology can bring to the table today, and really create a complete solution."

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