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Your 2010 whole house audio system is already obsolete

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Want to know if your system will be upgradeable in 10 years? Take a look at what the vendors you're thinking of using have done with the products they sold 10 years ago. I believe that residential electronics industry is largely ill-prepared for lifecycle technology support. The only providers that can properly provide that service are those that service enterprise, military and higher education clients.

On the left is the latest keypad from Niles Audio. On the right is its offering from 10 years ago. The old keypad is not supported on their new audio system. The new keypad is not supported on the old system.



Could an iPod and Pandora be controlled via the old keypad? Possibly, but it's not easy. Niles Audio, like Bose, Russound, Nuvo, Sonance and others – builds specific-purpose audio systems that aren't designed to be expanded or updated. Because of



that, they are cheaper to develop and install, but often become boat anchors when sources or needs change.



On the left is a Crestron panel from 10 years ago, on the right, its newest – the TPS-6X. We can add Pandora, iPod, satellite radio or ANY other source to the system on the left.

We can also add the latest TPS-6X to that same system without throwing out or working around ANYTHING.



Ambleside is working on overhauling an old system right now, and it's a mess. The home wasn't lived in for a while, some components failed and others became out of date. Several botched repair jobs later and now the system is unusable. This audio system was built with Crestron keypads and touchpanels which communicate to a Crestron control system. The control system in turn operates the sources, audio switcher and amplifiers.

Because it was built from flexible components sold by Crestron, a firm that supports its products, the system is now being upgraded to support iPod + satellite radio, and the broken hardware is being replaced. The entire refresh project has a budget of approximately 15% of the replacement cost of such a system: 15% after 11 years is very, very inexpensive in the technology world.

This home's keypads, controllers, power supplies and other control system materials were discontinued long ago. But they are still supported – both on the phone and in the technology. We took keypads created before MP3 existed and they are controlling an iPod. One cannot do this with the technology sold by Russound, Niles, or any other audio system vendor using the components they sold in 2000.

Even today, almost all vendors continue to obsolete their products. A friend asked me if he could run Rhapsody on his Control4 system. I looked into it and discovered that the original hardware – shipped less than 24 months ago – cannot run Rhapsody. Meanwhile, I can take 80% of the hardware of an 11-year-old Crestron system and bring it up to current standards.

I believe that the technology resources necessary to deliver a COMPLETE product (not just a prototype making claims of a set of features) is far beyond almost all home electronics industry manufacturers: they won't – or can't – provide the Documentation, ongoing software upgrades, technical and customer service, full lifecycle integration, all the code and engineering necessary to support legacy products. – For sellers of stand-alone components, such as receivers) the costs of replacement are cheaper than futureproofing legacy devices. For a multi-room control system, however, the costs to the owner of not having a flexible infrastructure are huge. How huge? I believe that because of the inability to keep current, the lifespan of a dedicated, single purpose music system bought today is less than five years. If a company such as Sonos survives, they might be an exception; no one else in the purpose-built music controller industry is prepared today for even Rhapsody, Pandora, last.fm, etc. AMX and Crestron-controlled systems are fine,

but no one else is prepared for the future. As for AMX vs. Crestron – take a look at where you would be if you bought an AMX music system 10 years ago...is that where you want to be 10 years from now?

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