

# CRTALKSTO: Crestron

Interview by Brian Ploskina

## ENERGY CONTROL

Crestron blazes a 'green' trail, while staying connected to its partners

There's never been a more critical time to justify an investment in home entertainment and control technologies than today. The housing and economic downturn has everyone, even the wealthy, wondering how much capital they can spend and still weather the storm. Crestron's spokesman Jeffrey Singer has some ideas, including ways to show how your customers can save money with some systems, depending on how environmentally conscious they are, and new Crestron initiatives that help educate the end user. He also reveals to *CustomRetailer* new technology Crestron is debuting later this year.

Some integrators have given us the impression that, essentially, "You're either a Crestron dealer, or you're not." In other words, either you buy into the entire Crestron universe, or you choose a different path. Would you consider this an accurate perception? Why or why not?

The real value proposition is that Crestron offers a complete and fully integrated solution and no one else can say that. There are other manufacturers out there that offer great products and do a great job. There is no one out there that can do all of that except Crestron. What we would say is the easiest and most seamless fully integrated system you can get would be a full Crestron system. It's all engineered and designed from the ground up to work that way. We do supply third party controls, but it's always easier when you deal with a single platform, in a single language, and have a single point of contact or support to take ownership so they will guarantee and certify it.



The environmental control dashboard displays real-time data on utility consumption throughout the home in terms the home owner can understand. It's displayed here on Crestron's TPMC-15 touch screen, however it can be accessed from anywhere. See the live demo at: [http://www.crestron.com/features/go\\_green/](http://www.crestron.com/features/go_green/)

**What's the most difficult thing to understand about Crestron technology? Where do most installers get hung up and need to ask questions?**

The questions that we get are generally the one-offs, a crazy request they've never run across and what are some of our ideas on how to do that. If there's a general area, there's a learning curve with IT networking and getting the A/V and control systems on the managed network and we do address that. We have courses as well as specialists here that can help with that. But that's not a reflection on us but the industry and where it's heading.

**You recently launched the Crestron Owners Group (COG), a grassroots end-user community. What was the genesis for COG, and how does it fit in/supplement other forms of support integrators utilize from Crestron?**

We do not ever sell equipment directly to end users. Having said that, we have the resources for helping our dealers by developing niche markets. What wound up happening is, we started off with the education people and they made it clear to us that they would love to be able to communicate with each other and share experiences, ideas and success stories. These are very unique situations



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—Jeffrey Singer, Crestron spokesman

in which those end users should have the skills and knowledge to support themselves on an ongoing basis. Now, doing system expansions and upgrades, buying software or hardware, that’s done through the dealer. We do not sell to the end user, we develop the marketplace to get dealers the business they wouldn’t be able to get otherwise.

**Last month, Crestron joined the U.S. Green Building Council, the organization responsible for creating the LEED Green Building Rating System. What specifically about Crestron products makes them “green”? How can integrators enhance or take advantage of this quality of Crestron products and highlight it for customers?**

That’s a big area for us. [In one specific example] in a given room, you can have a temp sensor and a lighting sensor. In the room, you can detect that the temperature in the room is getting warm. Rather than just kicking on the AC, you can close the shades. If that doesn’t cool it, you can turn on the ceiling fan. If that doesn’t work, you can kick on the AC. On the touch panels, we can even monitor that, so you can actually see the current energy levels being used and make adjustments. There’s an energy management level to it as well. [To see it in action, check out Crestron’s “Go Green” initiative at [www.crestron.com](http://www.crestron.com) and watch a live demonstration of the energy usage at “EcoManor” as it would display on a Crestron TPMC-15.]

**What is Crestron doing to help dealers meet this critical year in the business, one in which the economy is shrinking and the political dynamic is shifting?**

If you’re a Crestron dealer, you’re feeling very confident. You realize that we have such a broad and deep line of products and solutions that you’re going to be able to deliver a solution to just about anybody. If there’s one area that might slow up or dry up, you have plenty of other solutions to offer and not much to worry about. Our core business doesn’t slow down during those downturns. The depth and breadth of our line gives dealers the greatest opportunity when they’re going out in the

marketplace and trying to do business.

**Turn on the news today and you’re sure to hear about two things: a depressed housing market and a recessed economy. How is this affecting Crestron and its dealers?**

These economic downturns never seem to affect us negatively. Our bread and butter has really been the custom homes. The luxury homes. That doesn’t slow down. I think our core business is still fine.

**Some have suggested the housing problem will lead to requests for more retrofit applications versus new build. How is Crestron prepared to meet that demand?**

I think that’s a fair analysis. Certainly, if people were planning to sell their home and instead decide to stay put, they may want to upgrade and nobody has a crystal ball, but that’s fair. We’ve been addressing the retrofit market for a few years now. We have infiNET, our wireless mesh network technology. It’s ZigBee based. We have lighting, motion detection, shades, temperature, handheld controllers and a wireless hub that plugs into our control system. The control system will communicate to all these devices and you still have that two-way access.

**The news machine from Crestron was relatively quiet at CES this year. Do you still perceive CES as a relevant venue for communicating your message?**

There’s benefit to communicating directly to consumers. Having said that, we have to be careful because we sell and operate exclusively through established dealer and installer networks and so it might cause some confusion if we’re going to a show like CES where our installers or consumers might think you can get this at a Best Buy or Circuit City and install it yourself. Even our most basic and simple products and systems are professionally installed. It’s a delicate balance.

**The Management Conference is coming up and you’re a sponsor. Why is this conference important to Crestron? What does the industry community involvement do for Crestron and why is it important to you to invest in those relationships?**

We need to understand the marketplace in terms of what we do and what its value is. Now consumers are much more savvy and much more aware of what we do. You think back 10 years ago, nobody knew about home theater. ‘Why would I want that?’ ‘What is that?’ You told people what you did for a living and they had no idea. Now, through the trade associations, we collectively as an industry are creating a desire and demand and we all benefit from that, and that’s not something any one company can accomplish. We can most effectively do it together.

**A couple years ago, it seemed the biggest problem for integrators was finding good, reliable talent. Do you think that’s still a problem? How have Crestron’s training efforts helped to fix it?**

I think that’s true of any industry, I don’t care what you’re doing. You’re always in competition to find the top talent. I think that more and more there’s more smart, talented, experienced people in our industry. Our efforts contribute to that. We invest more in our education program than we do in our advertising and marketing. We do that because the best way to elevate our industry and grow is if we have successful installs, exceeding expectations.

**What can integrators expect from Crestron this year? What is Crestron’s core message to its integrators these days?**

They can expect a lot more products, about 100 new products in development right now. We’re partners now with Microsoft and Cisco. Particularly interesting about the Microsoft partnership is our engineering teams are working together to develop brand new technology that we will bring to the homes and home market. It has to do with digital media and it’s very exciting. We’re more focused on green solutions and environmentally conscious savings solutions. **CR**