CEPro

Crestron ADMS 'Ultimate Content Machine' is Shipping

Media server organizes music, video and other digital content from the home network and the Web and integrates under a single, universal search engine

Dec. 31, 2009 — by Julie Jacobson
The Crestron ADMS has left the building. The media server that made big news back in September 2008 is now in the hands of dealers.

CE Pro spoke with one of the first (only?) dealers to beta-test a unit in the field. Vivitech in New York City installed the server and a complete Crestron control system in a media mogul's home.

"It's a very powerful product," says Vivitech president Ed Driscoll. "I like that it has all solutions in one box. You can stream music over the same HDMI cable as the video library."

Before the ADMS came along, "Typically we would use a Mac Mini and drive everything through iTunes," Driscoll says. "Obviously, gobs of things are not available through iTunes and there's no HDMI."

Alternatively, in this case, he might have gone with a dual-core PC using Arcsoft software.

Instead, Driscoll and his client opted for the $9,000 ADMS because it is -- as Crestron VP technology Fred Bargetzi puts it -- "the ultimate content machine."

ADMS: Ultimate Content Machine

When Crestron debuted the ADMS in 2008, the system was revolutionary in the way it aggregated and organized content. Today, several mass-market products and services have caught up with some ADMS features, but none offers quite the package that Crestron has:

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Comprehensive Aggregation

The ADMS trumps other solutions that only aggregate content in the cloud. Crestron's product looks at the Web *and* the home network, including PCs, NAS drives, the ADMS's built-in hard drive (2 TB, 1 TB usable), and Crestron's own ADC-200BR Blu-ray changer.

Super Searching

Crestron's WorldSearch functionality was a first when it was demonstrated in 2008. Even though Boxee, Clicker.com, Hulu, Pioneer (E-Tap) and others have since launched universal search features, Crestron still seems to lead in that area.

- **Prioritization**. Crestron does a nice job of prioritizing your content. Search for "Shrek," for example, and the results will pop out first the premium content you already own (on the Blu-ray changer or home network), then the premium content available through an online provider (Amazon Video on Demand for now), and then the free stuff, say from YouTube or Hulu. You can sort only for full-length movies/episodes if you want.

  Bargetzi says "Netflix can be added" to the ADMS but Crestron has not divulged plans for its release.
- **Quick search**. The ADMS constantly searches for new music (including iTunes) and videos (including Amazon Video on Demand) online and pushes the metadata to the server.

  "Automatically, every night, it downloads a whole catalog," says Bargetzi. "Other systems just scrape the Web and they're much slower."
- **Search options**. You can take your chances and just search "Porsche" through WorldSearch, and you'll get every piece of content that has the word in its title, cast, artist, or other metadata. Or, you can opt to search by media type (TV, music, movie, other video) and/or criteria (keywords, title, artist/cast).

For all of those options, "the GUI [graphical user interface] is elegantly laid out and easy to get around," says Driscoll.

Driscoll's client does use WorldSearch and "gets on to Hulu now again" but most of his content resides in the Blu-ray changer and 10 TB worth of NAS drives on the home network.

Song Previews

Here's something no one else does: allow you to preview songs without interrupting your queue.

If you're building a music queue in the ADMS, and you can't quite remember what a certain Big Bad Voodoo Daddy song sounds like, you can preview it before adding it (or not) to your list.

When you're done with the preview, the ADMS takes you right back to your queue.

Great for iTunes

The ADMS might be the ultimate iTunes machine. Each night, it pushes all new iTunes content to the server so the user never has to open up the iTunes app.

Web browsing

If you don't find what you're looking for through WorldSearch, you can easily hop online to get to Netflix or other content providers. But you don't have to squint at itty bitty Web text.

Crestron provides a "highly modified browser so you can see it from the couch," says Bargetzi. There is a zoom feature and you can turn your Crestron touchscreen into a virtual mouse and keyboard.

Home Control

Naturally, the one thing you get with the ADMS that you can't get anywhere else is Crestron's huge array of controllers.

From the TV's onscreen display (OSD), you can control your lights, security system, multiroom audio and other systems.

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You can navigate through your media and home-control options using number of Crestron touchscreens and handheld remotes. Or you can use any generic PC remote with Bluetooth HID (human interface design) commands.

A Crestron system is required for home control, but the ADMS itself can be used as a standalone media server, controllable via any Bluetooth HID device such as a Gyration Air Remote or GlideTV.

DVD Ripping

The ADMS cannot rip DVDs to the hard drive. Crestron took the safe route, given all of the legal turmoils surrounding DVD copying.

Instead, the onus is on the consumer to figure out how to get their DVDs onto the home network.

"You can get anything into our box, so if you have it stored anywhere, you can copy it."

As for Ed Driscoll's client, "I'm not sure what he's using to get DVDs onto the network," Driscoll says. "I don't know on purpose. This is a functionality he wants, and it's not something I can recommend."

Blu-ray Changer and NAS

Rounding out the ADMS ecosystem is a 200-disc Blu-ray changer ($11,000) and 4 TB RAID 5 NAS ($8,000). Both products offer plug-and-play integration with the server.

Crestron's ADC-200BR Blu-ray changer can be cascaded to accommodate 1,000 discs, all of which are added automatically to the ADMS's video library.

While dealers and consumers are bound to compare it to the much cheaper 400-disc Sony BDP-CX7000E changer ($1,900), Crestron's changer is a whole different animal. It's not a standalone product, but an integral part of the whole ADMS ecosystem.

"There is seamless integration," says Driscoll. "It's basically a plug-and-play solution."

Besides the ability to integrate into the ADMS WorldSearch environment, the DVD player has another notable differentiator:

"Ours is data-grade with Firewire," says Bargetzi. "Sony only puts out HDMI, so you would have to switch HDMI inputs on the TV. Firewire is much more seamless."

While the Sony Blu-ray changer might take one minute to boot up a disc, says Bargetzi, Crestron's ADC-200BR takes about five or 10 seconds (as a demo proved). And, it resumes almost instantly.

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