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# Selecting the Safest and Best Home Theater For You

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# Selecting the Safest and Best Home Theater For You

## A Home Theater for the Kids

Home theaters are widely enjoyed by the whole family. Everyone likes to have their favorite programs brought to life with great video and outstanding audio. Though everyone can agree that they love home theater systems, there is a difference of opinion that can be a source of frustration.

On a Sunday afternoon, mom and dad may be interested in putting one of their favorite classic films into the DVD player and enjoying a great movie on an otherwise quiet day. Meanwhile, however, the children are likely to be clamoring for the latest animated release! Although the taste for a home theater may stretch across generations, so often taste in programming does not.

This has led many to consider constructing a second home theater system for the kids. That way, when a family debate brews over what to watch and when to watch it, there is a way to keep everyone satisfied.

The idea of a second home theater system may seem excessive to some, but with prices falling for good components, it can actually be a very reasonable investment. The rewards of having a second unit in operation are obvious, and the cost issue can be managed very successfully. By shopping carefully, recycling other equipment and remembering not to attempt to build a fully featured secondary unit, one can create an additional home theater system that will help to keep everyone happy without spending a fortune in the process. A kids' system may seem outlandish at first glance, but a closer examination reveals it to be a fairly compelling home theater investment.

The first thing to remember in constructing a secondary system is that it does not necessarily have to compete with the primary system in terms of quality. Although you want to provide a great entertainment experience, second systems generally will occupy less space and demand a little less technological advancement to do their jobs successfully.

This allows someone searching for a second system to do so with economy in mind. Instead of worrying about quality over all other concerns, price considerations can hold a primary role in the shopping process. There are some very nice systems well suited for smaller spaces that can be purchased for a relatively low price. One of these solutions may be just what one needs when expanding the number of home theater options.

Additionally, one can "feed" the new system with the old. As time passes and one develops a desire to upgrade the primary home theater system, the components formerly used as part of that system can be transferred to the secondary unit. In the end, the children's unit will end up having all of the technological power the parents once had for the primary system. This has the added advantage of making use of already purchased goods. Having a second system

where older components can be used is a great way of maximizing the return on one's original investment.

One need not over-invest in a second system. There is no need to provide it with a plasma television or an earth-shattering subwoofer. Think economy. Consider a nice twenty-seven inch conventional television and purchase a speaker system adequate to fill a small space. There is no need for stadium-style seating, high-end DVD players or other extra equipment you might be tempted to use for a high-grade system. The idea is to construct a secondary viewing and listening option--not to replicate the primary system in every regard.

Adding a second home theater system can be a great decision. It can increase household harmony and give everyone an opportunity to enjoy their favorite programming when they want to enjoy it. The cost issues can be easily surmounted by a combination of component "recycling" and bargain shopping.

In the end, everyone is happy. The adults can huddle on the couch and enjoy a film classic while the children gather 'round for a raucous cartoon. Adding a second home theater system provides a tremendous way to please all members of the household in an affordable manner.

### **A Safe Home Theater**

Technology draws children like moth to a flame. Kids just cannot resist electronics! Bright lights, mechanical sounds, and many buttons make a home theater system a magnet for a toddler's attentions. Unfortunately, their interest can lead to action and many systems have been destroyed by a curious child or one who just felt a DVD player was a great place to store a peanut butter sandwich. Just as it is important to childproof every other area of your home, it is also essential to childproof your home theater, because the potential damage your child can do to your equipment, and, more importantly the potential danger your equipment poses to your child, is significant.

Approach your home theater from a child's perspective. Seriously. Get down on your hands and knees to take a look. See what you can access and what your child can see and reach. Those areas are the places that need to be childproofed first. You probably know your child well enough to be able to predict what things he or she will find interesting. It is best not to limit your childproofing job to only these things, because, as children grow and develop, their interests change. It is best to assume anything and everything will interest him, and therefore, just about anything can constitute something of a threat.

Of course, the best method of childproofing is to place your child in a playpen. However, by the age of about one, most children are able to crawl out of an average-sized playpen, so you will have to deal with actually protecting your equipment. You could, perhaps, invest in taller walls for the playpen, but your child might feel confined, and this will only delay the inevitable. Although your child may feel comfortable sitting in the playpen while watching his or her favorite program, eventually they will want to explore what makes Barney pop up on the screen.

To protect your equipment, you may want to purchase a large screen to place one foot in front of your home theater. The problem with this idea is that it may obstruct the view or at least interfere with your viewing pleasure. You may want to invest in a very large piece of plexiglass to fit tightly over the entire unit. Another option is to make your home theater literally on the "high end" and place your panel set on the upper part of your wall at an angle. You can install high shelves for your VCR and DVD player, and install your speakers on the wall. The problem with this idea is that you will have to climb on chairs and ladders to give your equipment the proper maintenance. However, the peace of mind knowing that your equipment is far away from your child might be well worth it.

You can purchase a wooden home entertainment armoire that opens and closes. You might want to put a lock on the handle of the armoire to ensure that your child cannot get to your equipment when you are not around. This is a very secure way of storing your home theater, but you may not want to keep your equipment under lock and key all the time, and as soon as the cabinet is opened, your child's curiosity might be aroused.

You can purchase clear, plastic protectors that prevent your child from pressing buttons on your VCR or DVD player, but will still enable you to access through remote control. You can also find covers for your remote control, lest your child thinks that it is a fun toy. Another good idea is to place a protector on your disk drive to prevent your child from sticking his or her fingers or other objects inside. These are also plastic, and they close the unit off completely to prevent inappropriate access.

With all of the power that you will need for your home theater, exposed outlets are, of course, a major problem for children. Make sure that there are no open outlets and that they are plugged up with plastic plugs, if necessary. For children who already know how to plug and unplug from circuits, purchase a snap-on and off plastic power strip protector. It is impossible for a child to stick his or her fingers inside one of these covers, but at the same time, there is space to allow wires to feed through.

Regardless of what exact methods you choose, you really must take steps to childproof your home theater system if you have a youngster afoot. The risk to both your home theater investment and the child are simply too great to ignore.

## **Diagnosing Common Home Theater Sound Problems**

Sometimes a person thinks they have assembled the perfect home theater system only to find themselves dissatisfied with the performance. In some cases, this is attributable to making poor purchases. This article will review some common causes of disappointment and will look at how such problems can be avoided by choosing products that better meet an end user's actual needs.

Sound problems are incredibly frustrating because one of the most important aspects of the home theater experience is the element of sound. A great sound system will really bring a movie to life and can absolutely destroy a great movie when it is flat and weak. Many would argue that home theater sound is at least as important, if not more so, than home theater

video.

Sometimes the problems are severe and necessitate replacement of one or more component parts of the home theater system. In other cases, the problem can be simply corrected by making only minor adjustments to the system. The observations and recommendations supplied here are not comprehensive in nature and do not attempt to solve all sound problems encountered by a home theater owner. However, they do provide some helpful advice for anyone struggling with inadequate audio performance.

Sound problems are frequently encountered. Often, one will note that although sound is present, it doesn't sound sufficiently rich or varied. In many cases, the owner will immediately assume there is a need for a better set of speakers and will immediately make a purchase of a new surround sound speaker collection.

Although intuitive (the sound does come from the speakers, after all), this is usually a mistake. The problem in many cases is not the speakers at all. The problem is either in the connections from the amplifier or amplifier/receiver and the speakers or may be with the amplifier itself.

One should first check to see if the speakers are correctly connected on both ends of the system. If they are, one should spend some time determining if the speakers are at fault or if it is an amplification problem. You see, many home theater systems feature relatively low-powered amplifiers. These smaller amps, commonly encountered in cheaper "all-in-one" systems are often unable to sufficiently power speakers to produce the kind of sound one might want. This inadequacy can often be found in larger spaces when the sound fails to "fill the room."

To test to see what the real source of the problem is, one can hook up the same speakers to a different stereo or amplifier and compare their performance. Generally there is more power output from a traditional stereo and it can be amazing how much better a set of speakers will sound when adequately powered. However, one's first instincts could be correct if the speakers continue to under-perform when used with different amplifiers in different settings.

Another potential cause of poor sound is poor cabling. The cheaper cables sometimes provided with home theater purchases can occasionally be inadequate for the production of optimal sound. Cheap speaker wire can bring with it enough resistance to decrease the quality of sound, as well. If one is experiencing a sound-related problem of any sort, they should always consider that the problem may not be with a component, but with the connections between the components. Home theater sound problems can be avoided in many cases by following a few general principles. First, make sure everything is correctly connected after purchase. Second, be sure you have invested in an amplifier that will adequately power your speakers and produce enough sound to fill the space in which you will be placing the home theater. Third, always check cabling carefully and strive to use only high quality cables with your home theater system.

If one takes these relatively simple precautions and a great deal of frustration can be avoided. If your home theater's sound isn't where you need it to be, use those hints as a blueprint as you analyze your system. If it really is time to look for new components, consider those directives as you make your next purchase.

## **Common Errors in Home Theater Selection**

Everyone wants a home theater, but not everyone conducts enough due diligence on the subject before entering the marketplace. As a result, they end up with systems that don't do what they need them to do. Sometimes they end up with systems that are far too powerful than what they really need. A well-informed and researched consumer can avoid all of this. This article will discuss a few common errors in home theater selection in hopes of providing others with the information they need to avoid problems.

One common error is putting together a system that lacks adequate amplification. This is particularly common among those who purchase less expensive systems and then attempt to use them in larger spaces. Often, bargain systems utilize smaller amplifiers that are not able to power speakers adequately to handle larger rooms. An absence of amplification is a common problem for new home theater buyers.

Fortunately, it is one that is easy to avoid. One must simply look not only for a low price tag but for adequate power, as well. Usually the sole cause of this difficulty is the attempt to save a few bucks. Ask a sales associate or a knowledgeable friend about how much power you should really have and take their advice. That small increase in upfront cost will represent a savings over an otherwise inevitable upgrade.

Often, speakers fail to adequately perform once they are brought home. What sounded great in the showroom sounds muddled and weak in the living room. Was the buyer a victim of a bait and switch? Probably not. Far more likely is the prospect that the consumer failed to position his speakers optimally upon setting them up at home.

One must fight the urge to set up speakers based on their aesthetic sense. Speakers are about sound and should be arranged to optimally provide sound for the home theater. Consult the manufacturer's directions and/or utilize a trial and error strategy to optimally place the speakers. The results of simple shifts in elevation, angle and distance can be remarkable.

Another frequently encountered problem is that of space. Greedy by nature, people often try to fit larger screens in their homes than can really be handled. Usually, the consumer will measure the space to determine what size of screen he or she needs and will buy based on that calculation.

However, that size does not reflect the screen's casing or the actual footprint of the unit. People frequently underestimate the amount of floor space that will be required and often end up purchasing a screen that is far too big for their available space. A large screen is wonderful in the abstract, but it is nothing less than annoying when one is sitting only a few feet from it and can count every pixel! Take into account the amount of floor space and don't forget to compensate for the size of the screen's casing when making a purchase.

Errors like these take place daily as people buy home theaters. Fortunately, all of these miscues are easily avoidable with a little bit of care and attention. Take a few moments to make purchases wisely and conduct sufficient research before entering the store and you can avoid many common problems altogether.

Why allow yourself to suffer with the wrong system simply due to a lack of effort on the front end? A home theater can be a significant purchase and one should embark on that purchase only after having truly determined what they need. Additionally, once the purchase is made, the consumer should take great care in determining how the system can be best installed.

Following these simple guidelines can prevent many home theater frustrations.

## **Housing Your Home Theater Equipment**

After spending money on home theater equipment, it is only natural that you'll want to spend some time in choosing the proper place to store your equipment. There are a wide variety of styles to choose from in audio video furniture. It is wise to spend time evaluating the plan for your home theater space, as well as your budget, when deciding on the best audio video furniture for you.

The simplest audio video furniture for your home theater space is the stand or simple cabinet. These types of audio video stands are designed to have clean simple lines and house a minimal amount of equipment. They are normally lower in height and stand only a few feet off the ground. The stand or simple cabinet consists of two to three shelves that may be open or have doors. The advantage to having doors on your unit is that dust and other particles are kept away from the sensitive audio video equipment. Styles include wooden and metal-framed units to suit every sensibility.

Depending on the materials used and the actual size of the unit, these low cabinets range in price from \$300 to \$2500. It is important that you understand the weight requirements of the unit that you purchase so you can accommodate your home theater set up. Risking your equipment on cheaply made cabinets can cost your thousands of dollars.

To add storage space to your home theater system, consider adding four and five shelf tall units to your low cabinet. These tall shelving units are perfect for additional equipment that cannot be housed in the low cabinet as well as your DVD movie collection. Each cabinet shelf can be devoted to a different film genre to make searching for the perfect movie simple and effortless. In addition to tall shelf units, there are also tall units that can house front left and front right speakers. This is an excellent option to consider in order to protect your speakers from exposure to the elements. This is especially important if your audio video area is in direct sunlight during parts of the day. Taller storage cabinets have a price range of \$400 to \$1600. Again, remember that investment in quality audio video furniture is important to the life of your equipment.

Another option is modular audio video furniture. These pieces allow you to custom build your own audio video set up. With two, three and four shelf pieces, modular audio video furniture is totally customizable. Most modular systems have open shelving set ups. This can cause some problems when it comes to keeping your equipment free from dust and debris. However, the flexibility of modular systems makes this an attractive option for many home theater enthusiasts.

Modular systems provide sleek, compact environments for equipment. Most are constructed of glass tubing and fiberboard composite shelves. With the fiberboard shelves it is important to avoid overloading the shelves. Proper modular systems should also include carpet spikes to help secure the shelving to the carpeted floor, or vinyl glide feet for use on hardwood or tile floors. Modular audio video furniture units range in price from \$90 to \$800.

A very simple solution for those who do not have a lot of space for their home theater area is the mini audio system stand. These space saving units hold a wide range of speaker types and can be placed throughout the home theater area for surround sound effects. Mini audio system stands are easy to assemble and look very sleek. Quality mini audio system stands cost anywhere from \$100 to \$350.

Another space saving option is an enclosed rack system. When space is critical and you would like to fit all of your audio video equipment into one shelving unit, an enclosed rack system can assist you. The enclosed rack system can be installed into a cabinet area. The rack system slides out of the cabinet space and then rotates, allowing you to have access to the back wires of your audio video equipment. Quality rack systems are composed of black melamine and are secured with high-quality bolts to ensure that your audio video equipment is protected.

## **Reasons to Own a Home Theater System**

Few things are more fun than a movie on the big screen. Experiencing the excitement of great action and high drama can make you feel like you have entered another world. The characters seem as real as your neighbors. Unfortunately, the movie theater itself can destroy your good time. Knees in the back of your seat, crying children and the inevitable loudmouth can conspire to ruin your movie completely. Fortunately, you can avoid that motley crew altogether by bringing the movies home with a great home theater system. All you need is a few basic components, and you can escape the downside of the theater and soak up all of the movie magic in your own home.

Home theater ownership is relatively economical, too. A family can spend the equivalent of their utility bill at the movies! Tickets alone are expensive, but once you add a few treats to the equation, prices really start to skyrocket. We used to think of the movies as a cheap night out. Now one wonders if they need to talk with their financial planner before scheduling a matinee.

Home theater systems are an efficient purchase. No more long movie or concession lines for the home theater owner! Instead, he simply plops down on a comfortable seat at home and grabs the remote. There's no longer a need to gulp down a dinner to make a 7:15 showing of a movie, either. You watch what you want when you want with no risk of a sellout. Not only do you avoid the sellout, you also avoid the crowd usually present at exciting new first-run movies. There are few things more irritating than spending your hard-earned money getting elbowed in the dark by a stranger who can't seem to sit still. At home, there's always space. And there's never a former NBA center sitting in front of you.

The efficiency continues when you consider the stops at the ATM machine you avoid, the ability to skip getting dressed for an evening out, the process of organizing a family movie trip, and all

of the other traditional hassles you avoid when the cinema is actually in your house.

Have you ever missed a critical movie scene because of an uncontrollable need to run to the restroom? Have you ever wished a filmmaker had built in an intermission somewhere during his three-hour opus? With home theaters, you don't need to worry. If you need a break, you hit pause.

Movie popcorn rarely lives up to expectations, especially when one factors in price. Overcooked wieners, flat soda pop and candy that costs more than your first car round out the concession line scam at the theaters. You can do better at home, and for a lot less money, too.

If cleanliness is next to godliness, the standard movie theater floor may be hell on Earth. Home theater owners watch movies barefoot instead of collecting someone's pre-chewed gum on their heel. They don't accidentally sit on a half-eaten candy bar left behind by someone else. The filth of many movie theaters is almost enough to make one swear off movies. They don't have to worry, though, when the theater is in the home.

Home theaters are a social hub. Family members gather 'round to watch movies and to discuss the stories and things they see. A home theater sound system can become the stereo to which all family members hum along. Give a kid a video game system and a home theater and you may never see him or her emerge again. Everyone loves a home theater!

There is nothing quite like the movies, and the only way to make that popular pastime better is to take the movies away from the theaters and put them right into your own home. Home theater ownership offers a ton of great advantages. There is no reason to keep giving your money to the purveyors of stale popcorn and soggy nachos! Instead, curl up for your favorite movie on the couch and enjoy a riveting experience without annoyance.

### **Five Reasons NOT to Buy a Home Theater**

Everyone is talking about home theaters. They are, perhaps, the hottest area of the consumer electronics market, as people clamor for a way to duplicate the big screen experience within the confines of their own home. Every day, home theaters are advancing in quality and decreasing in price, leading more and more people to make an investment in a home theater system.

However, a home theater may not be a good idea for everyone. In fact, for some people home theater ownership is a downright horrible idea. Who should avoid home theaters? Look at some of these characteristics and you will begin to understand why some may not want to buy a home theater. If you fall into any of these categories, you may want to think twice before buying a home theater system.

First, those who enjoy wasting money should probably give up on the idea of a home theater completely. Instead of spending a small fortune for a ticket, a small soda and some stale popcorn, one can watch an awesome movie at home on the cheap with a home theater system. Those who would prefer to squander their resources at the theaters repeatedly should probably keep trudging back to the cinema instead of enjoying high quality video and sound at home.

Second, those with a masochistic streak should probably stick with old school movie watching and resist the urge to enter the home theater market. At home, there are no long lines just to get into the living room and generally, one can get to and from the refrigerator for refreshment within a matter of moments. Home theaters do not force one to test the limits of their bladder, either. Instead of having to wait and wait so as not to miss a moment of the action, the home theater user can simply pause the film. Those who appreciate the punishments of the cinema experience are probably not going to be interested in a home theater.

Third, those who do not actually enjoy watching and listening to movies should also avoid home theaters. Instead, they can hit the movie house, and experience a new release right next to the guy who will not stop talking on his cell phone and right in front of the arguing couple. Mr. Loudmouth will be in the back, offering his commentary and there will be at least one former NBA superstar blocking a significant portion of the screen. Those who prefer their movies chock-full of annoyances should really avoid a home theater investment.

Finally, anyone who would not like something fun to do with friends and family can give up on the notion of a home theater. If you prefer a dull home life and do not want to surround yourself with some truly interesting entertaining options, you should avoid investing in a home theater system. They provide a great movie or television watching experience along with an amazing sound system. That just might not be what some people want.

OK, all of that may have been a little tongue-in-cheek, but it makes a good point or two. There are many reasons why most of us would absolutely relish ownership of a great home theater system. We all love the movies, and we all recognize just how frustrating the movie going experience can be. The home theater system provides a way of seizing all of that entertainment value while allowing us to avoid the increasingly annoying downside we experience at our local multiplex.

There are some people for whom a home theater system may not make much sense, but those folks really are few and far between. The bulk of us would love to add an entertaining centerpiece to our home lives, and home theater systems provide a way of doing just that. With the prices of systems plummeting and great new products in the home theater system area entering the market all of the time, now is a great moment to seize the opportunity, too.

### **Have You Outgrown Your Home Theater System?**

Many times, people experiment with a relatively inexpensive home theater system to get a feel for ownership and to determine whether or not the presence of a home theater increases their enjoyment of movies and television. When they find out how much they enjoy having a home theater system, they begin to look for a new system to replace their old starter system.

If you feel you have outgrown your existing home theater system, but aren't sure what to do next, you may want to consider a few of these observations.

First, don't throw away your old system. As long as it is still operable, there is no reason to get rid of it. As we will discuss, your old system may be a great way to build a secondary system or to supply some of what you will need for a new system. Additionally, if your old system is still functioning it can serve as a backup just in case you encounter problems with your next home theater system.

Second, consider building up the new system. Instead of simply scrapping the old and buying new, carefully analyze the components of your old system to determine if there are any pieces that remain usable as you grow your system. In many cases one or more of the components from an older system can still be used as one advances.

This system not only maximizes the return on your original equipment investment, it also serves as a way to cut costs on the new system. One should always consider upgrading piece by piece if the existing components are of anything close to adequate quality.

If you find that you cannot or will not be able to use parts of your earlier system as building blocks for a new system, consider using your old system as a secondary home theater for children or a guest room. It can be a great way of increasing the number of entertainment options in your home. Doing this will really not cost anything. Your focus will be on using your old technology and there is no reason to invest in additional equipment. Kids will love having a little home theater of their own upon which they can watch the latest animated movie while the adults enjoy a classic drama in the next room.

Finally, when it comes time to build your new system, approach the matter with all the caution and care you did with your first. Do your research. Search for bargains. Do not be in such a hurry to acquire a new home theater that you practice poor buying habits.

Home theaters can bring a great deal of fun and entertainment into a household. In fact, they are often so appreciated that those who own them eventually consider moving up to better and better systems over time. What was once a successfully purchased entry-level system may not be just a little less than one wants when watching a movie or a television program. If you feel this way and believe you have outgrown your home theater system, you should take some of the ideas mentioned here to heart before leaving your home to go buy a new system.

Make use of what you have, consider alternative uses for your existing system, and approach buying your new home theater system with an eye toward maximum value after conducting adequate research.

### **Simple Suggestions for Home Theater Owners**

There are plenty of tips and recommendations out there involving the selection, purchase and installation of home theater rigs. With home theater popularity skyrocketing, many have taken it upon themselves to provide resources and direction for those considering a home theater purchase.

What about those who have already made the investment in a great home theater system? Those who are buying systems have a world of valuable information right at their fingertips. Once the check is signed or the credit card processed, however, these buyers disappear from the sites of the home theater experts.

As such, there are very few tips or recommendations available for those who already own a home theater system. This article, however, does spell out some very simple things you can do to maximize the enjoyment of your home theater.

One of the best things a new home theater owner can do is to find a place for their paperwork. Too often, installation guides, warranties and other documentation end up in a box or bag, destined for the garbage.

These documents are actually quite important. If there is ever a problem with the system, the materials provided with your system will help you to understand exactly what is happening. In addition to being a valuable troubleshooting aid, the owner's manuals are exceedingly handy when one forgets how to use a particular feature. The documentation is also useful when one moves or rearranges the system, as the provided schematics will help you to make sure all the proper connections are in place. If there is ever a serious problem with the equipment and it stops operating, the manufacturer's warranty an/or store guarantees will be necessary to secure new equipment or free repairs.

If you have a home filing cabinet, this is a great place to store the information. If not, store it somewhere easy to find and remember.

Another helpful hint for home theater systems involves remote control batteries. Sometimes it seems as if a remote control's batteries will last forever. As soon as we convince ourselves of that, however, we suddenly find the remote difficult to operate or completely dead. Invariably, it seems, we never have the right replacement batteries immediately available, making for an annoying evening in front of the big screen!

Purchase and store an extra set of batteries for all remote controls. Put them somewhere you can easily find them and one commonly encountered hassle can be completely avoided. Some advocate storing batteries in a refrigerator or freezer to increase their active lifespan. This is one possibility that might be considered.

Another commonly encountered problem occurs after we let someone else use or operate our home entertainment system. A multi-component system can seem complicated for a new user. It seems as if every time someone else, whether it be a novice family member, friend or babysitter, takes the helm of the home entertainment system, they run into problems trying to figure out how to make it work. Sometimes this is just an inconvenience to them. On other occasions, it results in changed settings and subsequent confusions for the primary user, too.

One can find relief from this problem by writing or typing up a simple step-by-step instruction sheet for use of the system. This will allow other users to enjoy the home theater system without risking a frustrating experience. A home theater "cheat sheet" can make things run quite smoothly no matter who holds the remote.

Home theaters can be complicated assemblies, and there are several great resources for hints and tips regarding their use and optimization. However, it is easy to lose track of some of the more basic issues involved with home theater ownership. It is also easy to overlook some basic things we can do to make our home theater system a better investment.

By storing all documentation in a centralized location, maintaining extra remote control batteries and creating a step-by-step user "cheat sheet," one can make owning a home theater system a little easier and a lot more efficient.

## **Selling Your Home Theater System**

The home theater system market is booming as more and more people begin to recognize the awesome entertainment value a good system provides. The entry-level buyers are coming out in large numbers as news circulates that home entertainment systems are an affordable option for almost any household.

If you are like many home theater owners, you might be considering upgrading your system. There is probably nothing wrong with the system you have already assembled, but after tinkering with it and seeing some of the newer options available you might just feel like it's time to "move up a notch" by investing in superior components.

What are you going to do with your old home theater system? Assuming it is more than an antiquated television set and a BetaMax VCR, you probably should consider selling it.

Lower end systems are in high demand on the new market because of price considerations. First-time buyers and those at the home theater socioeconomic periphery are looking for ways to experience the joys of superior home entertainment at a price that meets their needs. They are amenable to purchasing used components—especially if the purchase will save them money.

If you opt to sell your existing home theater system, you will first have to determine what constitutes a fair price for the technology with which you are parting. One certainly wants to make as much money as possible off the sale. However, it is equally important not to overprice the system so that buyers are not scared away.

In order to determine a fair asking price, it is important to first stop thinking about what you spent on the system. Too often, sellers become concerned with their initial investment and hope to recoup a figure close to that cost. This perspective may be understandable, but it is really little more than a pipe dream.

This is because the price of technology, especially pre-existing technology, drops every day. Systems that cost several thousand dollars only a few years ago may today be rivaled from pre-boxed products that only cost a few hundred dollars. If one becomes hung up on their investment level, they may have a hard time determining a fair price.

One should look carefully at his or her components and then try to discover what similar pieces,

offering the same performance levels and featuring the same attributes are currently fetching. That number should then be at least halved when determining a reasonable asking price.

Why such a draconian cut in price? It's due to a combination of factors. First, the products you will be selling probably lack any guarantee or warranty. This, in and of itself, is reason to cut price considerably. Second, the equipment you are selling is used. It may be gently used and you may have maintained it religiously, but it is still used. Any buyer will be taking this into account, so should the seller.

Used equipment can be sold through online venues like eBay or via a traditional classified ad. When selling the equipment, the research you performed in order to set a price will come in handy. You should take the time and effort to describe the product and contrast its capabilities with new models with the same attributes. When the customer sees what they will be paying new for the same level of performance and then sees that your price is only one-half of that, a sale is likely.

One may want to pad the price tag somewhat in newspaper sales situations to provide some wiggle room during negotiation. Used equipment buyers tend to angle for the best deal and will often try to secure an even lower price than the one advertised. If a seller builds some leeway into the asking price, their ability to effectively negotiate is improved.

Your home theater system provided you with some memorable television and movie moments. It entertained your family so much that you are now considering taking the next step and investing in an improved system. Now is a good time to allow someone else to enjoy the system, too. By selling your used electronics equipment, you can put a great system into a first-time buyer's hands while also putting some cash in your own pocket.

### **Three Ways to Grab Home Theater Bargains**

Everyone is looking for the best possible deal when they shop. When they are looking for more expensive non-essential items, like a home theater, that desire for a great deal almost becomes a necessity. One can spend a great deal building the perfect home theater. However, some great techniques can help a buyer save a bundle. By shopping for discontinued items, refurbished components and open box pieces, the home theater buyer can cut their costs tremendously.

#### **Discontinued Items**

If money is no object and you simply must have the latest in high technology for your home theater system, looking at discontinued items will not be too appealing. However, if you are like most of us and could stand to save a few dollars, last year's model may be the perfect fix.

Every year, component manufacturers roll out new product lines. Sometimes the latest models are a far superior product than earlier versions. In other cases, the changes may be merely aesthetic. Often, when the new products come in, retailers will deeply discount older product lines that are no longer in production. This can give a buyer a chance at some great savings if

they know what they are looking for.

You do not want to compromise the quality of your home theater, so make sure the discontinued product truly possesses the characteristics you need in order to be happy with the finished set-up. If a discontinued item cannot really deliver what you need, it simply is not the right purchase for you. However, by doing your homework you might find a discontinued product line that really does deliver more than enough of what you need—at a greatly reduced price.

### **Refurbished Items**

If a manufacturer ships a unit to retailers and it comes out of the box with a blemish or a single broken knob or toggle switch, it may end up being sent back for refurbishment. Factory technicians restore the slightly damaged product to “good as new” status. Nonetheless, the products are considered “refurbished” and generally command a lower price when they return to store shelves.

Even in cases where real damage did exist, the unit is generally well repaired prior to resale. Refurbished components also generally come with all standard new product guarantees and warranties in place.

These factors make refurbished home theater components a great possible way to save money when putting together a system. You get the same product found on other shelves at full price for a fraction of the cost while bearing no additional risk.

### **Open Items**

Eventually, even the display models are sold. If you are the person who buys that display model, you can save a fortune, too. As new products replace the old or a new sale takes over for a seasonal special, display models are retired. These store-used products are generally offered at a greatly reduce price and still carry all original guarantees and warranties.

One should note that some display models end their shelf lives in better shape than others do. One surely does not want to invest in a piece that looks over-used or worn down. If there are signs of a problem, the display model should be avoided. In many cases, however, the display model is a perfect alternative to paying full retail.

Display models are not the only “open item” bargains. Often, stores will process returns of orders that simply did not meet a customer’s needs or that were unwanted gifts. As a rule, if the package has been opened, the retailer will drop the price. Just because someone’s Aunt Margaret did not want that DVD player does not mean that it will not be perfect for you! Searching out open item bargains can be a great way to save a lot on your home theater purchase.

By expanding one’s horizons to consider discontinued products, refurbished models and opened items, the home theater shopper can find some great bargains and bring down the price of his or her system considerably. For those who feel the need for only the newest and only the best, these options may seem almost gauche. For the rest of us, however, they are a welcome way

to save a few dollars on an otherwise expensive proposition.

## **Two Ways to Beef Up Your Home Theater System**

Perhaps you already own a home theater system and are generally pleased with its performance, but have some desire for an improvement. You know your system is basically adequate and don't really have any specific complaints, but you know the experience could be better. What can you do? You certainly don't want to scrap the system you have built and start anew. You just need something different to add a little spark to the home theater viewing and listening experience.

There are a few simple adjustments you can make that may beef up your home theater system considerably. Some of these solutions can breathe a great deal of new life into an old system, rendering it far more valuable and enjoyable to use.

### **Bring the bass.**

Sound is half of the home theater experience. Some audiophiles would argue that it is worth even more than that. A great sound system can really elevate a movie's quality and bring it to life. Most home theater set-ups recognize this. They feature an adequately powered set of speakers, often in five separate channels, to provide a great "surround sound."

However, that is not always enough to really get the most out of a film. Many have found that the surround sound system of speakers does a great job in the midranges and with higher sounds but under-performs on the lower end of the sonic spectrum. As such, subwoofers are very popular add-ons for home theater systems.

The subwoofer is a separate speaker that handles the bass in an audio transmission. If you have ever experienced that wonderful thumping sensation of low music and sound, you were probably experiencing a great subwoofer in action. The subwoofer doesn't just supply the bass (although it does that wonderfully), it also frees up the rest of the system to concentrate on its strengths.

By adding a subwoofer to aid your sound system, you can give your home theater system a real boost.

### **Better connections.**

Cabling is an often overlooked aspect of home theater design. The cables that connect your components and speakers together transmit all of the necessary power and information that produces picture and sound. We often think that any old cable will do. However, some have found that replacing older cables and cheaper ones with higher quality materials can actually boost the quality of video and audio considerably.

If your system seems a little flat, a new set of cables might be just what you need. Changing from the stock cables that may have come with your components to higher end cables featuring

better conducting connectors and less overall resistance may improve the performance of your system a great deal.

These two ideas can really revitalize a home theater system whether done separately or in tandem. The overall quality of the viewing and listening experience can receive a real facelift from using these two tried and true techniques. If your system just seems a little bit lacking, you may want to consider adding a subwoofer to your audio mix. You may also want to make a relatively small investment in some high end cabling, as the replacement of your old wiring may make your system sound new again.

Before you junk your slightly under performing home theater system, try one of these techniques and see if it doesn't produce just the kind of results for which you are looking.

### **Three Great Home Theater Add-Ons**

So, you invested in a great home theater system. Congratulations, you are sure to be pleased with your decision. Entertainment will really come to life in a whole new way as you enjoy movies and television with a great picture and perfect sound. A home theater system will change the way you look at home entertainment in general.

You bought the perfect television and found the audio components you needed to be happy. You also obtained a great DVD player so that you could begin watching all of your favorite movies right away. You are probably anxious to get started! Before you do, however, consider a few more things you might add to make your system even more enjoyable. These three small add-ons may not seem like much, but they can really improve the quality of your home theater experience.

First, look around and notice just how many remote controls you have. Depending on how you set up your system, you could be dealing with as many as five or six separate remote controls! Even if you went with a relatively simplistic set up, you still probably have multiple remotes sitting on the arm of the sofa. That's why it is high time to invest in a universal remote control. Simplify operation of your system by paring down to a single remote controller. These programmable remote controls are capable of operating a slew of components. Find one that has enough options to handle all of your components, and search out a universal remote that is clearly compatible with the components you own.

A universal remote may only cost a few bucks, but it can make a huge difference. The home theater experience is far more enjoyable when you can control every aspect of the system with one hand.

Second, consider purchasing a DVR. A digital video recorder will let you freeze live television, record the programs of your choice with ease, and replay those programs in a way that makes skipping television commercials a snap. DVRs rely on user-friendly, yet powerful programming interfaces and can serve to multiply the value of your cable television investment. A DVR was once a novelty, but with prices so reasonable they are becoming more and more commonly used simply because they offer so much.

Never miss your favorite show. Stop yawning through all of the commercials. Make sure you can watch all of the movies that subscription cable channel is offering in which you have an interest. A DVR allows you to do all of these things at a very low price tag. If there is one component that everyone should add to an already workable home theater system, it is a DVR.

Third, consider your seat. Usually, when we think about home theater systems, we think about the technology that brings an image to the screen and music to our ears. However, in order to enjoy a home theater experience, you have to have a comfortable seat from which to enjoy the show. There are special video chairs designed with television viewing comfort in mind. Alternatively, one may want to visit their local furniture retailer and find something truly comfortable in which to sit. Your home theater was purchased so that you would have a credible alternative entertainment option at home. It's hard to justify the investment when it goes unused due to discomfort.

Buying the mandatory components was a great start, but it doesn't represent the real end state of home theater Nirvana many of us seek. In order to elevate the home theater bit, one should also add a universal remote controller, a personal digital video recorder and a comfortable chair to the mix.

Now, it's time to sit back and enjoy the show. With a great home theater, single hand control of all aspects of the experience, a DVR on standby and a great chair in which to get some much deserved relaxation, the home theater experience can be just what you were looking for when you made the initial purchase of your components.

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