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## Electronics Design vs. Installation

There's a fine line between the two, but understanding their differences are important to the end result.

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September 10, 2013 by Lisa Montgomery

The integration of electronic systems into a house can be a complicated process, involving lots of different products, various contractors and many, many decisions. "We aren't just big gorillas who bring in boxes and magically everything works," says custom electronics professional John Lattion, Creative TSI, Calgary, Alberta. "What we do is really more of an art." And this art hinges largely on the custom electronics pro's ability to design. Just as an architect designs a plan for the construction of a house a CE pro designs a plan for the installation of the electronics gear. "The design is what drives the installation," says Rob Dzedzy of Media Rooms Inc., West Chester, Pa. Consequently, if the design is under par, so might be the installation of your wiring network, TVs, speakers, home control keypads and other components.

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The best designs happen before the construction of a new house or the rehab of an existing residence begins, and the all-important first step is meeting with your CE pro to learn what's possible, reveal your expectations and determine how you'd like your house to perform. At this point, there's no need to choose specific products (although it's okay if you have specific items in mind). A simple "Yes, I'd like to be able to watch movies in my bedroom," is enough information for a CE pro to put together a design.

Designs come in a few different forms. Some CE pros provide elaborate renderings in CAD, with locations of products illustrated; others might create a narrative that explains room by room how the installation of components will unfold; then there are those that mock up line drawings. "Usually, the more sophisticated the installation, the more detailed the design needs to be," says Dzedzy.

Details in the electronics design will provide important direction to the other trades on the job. For example, if the electronics design calls for a large flat-panel TV mounted to the wall in the family room, included should be a request that your architect or builder construct that appropriate structural supports. By the same token, renderings from the architect can be just as useful to a CE pro. Locations of windows will help a CE pro determine the best spot for a TV, for example.

Only after everyone is on-board with the design can the actually installation start. And sometimes, the design is enough, says Eric Thies, a founding partner of home technology provider and integrator VIA International. "Some homeowners may not want to commit to an installation right away, but need answers like how big to build a theater room and the appropriate structural supports for a ceiling mounted video

projector, for example." When you are ready to commit, you can continue to work with the CE pro who designed the electronics plan or, if it's permissible via the contract with your CE pro, obtain bids from other companies to handle the installation only. According to CE pros, the latter approach rarely happens, because it's during the design process that relationships and trust are formed.

How you'll be charged for the design and installation differs by company, too. Most CE pros roll their design fee into the total project cost; others will charge separately for design and installation. For huge projects, it can be beneficial to hire a firm that does design work only.

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Lisa Montgomery has been writing about home technology for 15 years, with a focus on the impact of electronics on a modern lifestyle.

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