Take your blindfold off and elevate the service experience for your clients

Pete Baker, president of The BIG Corp sales and business development agency and ex-vice president of sales and marketing at RTI, underlines the need for remote monitoring.

It's Friday night and it has been a long week, finally, you get a chance to sit down and stop. But, as soon you place your phone on the counter it starts ringing. You peek at the screen and notice that it is your VIP client. You can't avoid this call; you pick up and realise that your week isn't over yet.

'I'm having a party at my house and nothing works, I need one of your techs out here... now!' You calm your client down and then start the process of troubleshooting over the phone with a frustrated client, totally blind.

Today, every company must be exceptional at one thing; providing outstanding customer service. In regards to the above scenario, there are three primary common problems that integrators would do well to ~~remedy:~~ The dealer was blindsided by an urgent matter that must be resolved quickly, the dealer was blind to the operating status of the devices in the system, most importantly, the client paid a lot of money and does not want to spend their leisure time troubleshooting.

There are a series of 'device supervision' products on the market that do exactly this. They are relatively small, black boxes that need just power and a network connection to monitor the operating status of all devices on the network. Once connected to the network, these devices can be configured to notify designated people when a device locks up or attention is needed, e.g. if a battery on a remote must be replaced or firmware updated. Some of the more advanced devices will allow you to update software remotely or offer more sophisticated functions.

Device supervision products are often visible from a 'dashboard' on a computer or App-based interface of a smart phone or tablet. These dashboards will allow you to view the operating status of all network-attached devices in a system. Many will also offer the ability to view historical data for the system. For instance, if a client calls on Monday and complains about a 'slow network' on Friday, you could roll the tape back and view the activity log to determine what may have bogged down the network. This service does come with a small investment in 'cloud services' like iCloud or Dropbox.

Without remote monitoring, installers are working blind-folded

These devices are reasonable in price and offer tremendous value, they will not only provide full visibility of a system at any time, from anywhere, but they also empower integrators to be proactive in their service and support.

The good news is that supervision devices can be used on every project, especially important for vacation homes, where the system may not be used very often and ~~could~~ remote. Inclusion of these devices provides every integrator with a competitive edge and ensures a more positive user experience for their most valuable asset: the customer.

When I worked as an integrator (for 20 years of my career), I would include a section in my proposals titled 'Integration Hardware and Materials'. This section would often include some of the following items: surge protection/ power conditioners, wire, interconnect cables, IR systems, cooling fans, etc. I would often tell clients that these were all the small parts and materials that were necessary to make the system operate. This is where I suggest including supervision devices. My justification to my client would remain the same, just with one additional word at the end: 'reliably'.

Monitoring can be handled in a few different ways, the easiest being to add it into the price of the device and state that it includes 'X' many years of cloud supervision with additional years being billed at a rate of $X/year or month. This can also be set-up as an auto-bill feature with most accounting systems.

Device supervision products are a very hot topic in the industry at the moment, as are recurring month revenue (RMR) models. I ~~suspect~~ this to become a standard device in systems of the future with many adopting this practice now. The benefit to the end user is trouble-free enjoyment of their entertainment system. If the system is complicated and troublesome, no one will recommend adding this home technology to friends and family, but if it is enjoyable they will be more likely to send referrals to you.

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