



BALLISTIC

that's how it's going

SMART HOME SOLUTION'S MANAGING DIRECTOR, JAMES BILLINGTON, SAYS THE WHOLE HOME AUTOMATION MARKET IS GOING 'BALLISTIC.' AND HE SHOULD KNOW, HAVING BEEN A STRONG PROPONENT FOR THIS INDUSTRY FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, REPORTS

PAMELA CONNELLAN.

Top: Smart Home Solutions is well versed in how to set up home automation systems and has custom installed these systems in many diverse homes.

WITH SIX FULL-TIME STAFF AND QUITE A NUMBER OF part-timers and contractors, Smart Home Solutions (SHS) has been servicing Sydney and surrounds for 10 years as a design and installation company of electronic lifestyle systems.

Thirty years is a long time and that's how long James Billington has been in the industry. CEDIA Australia was formed back in 1993 and it's no coincidence Billington ended up being the founding president for this organisation.

Billington says he always felt strongly about the need for a professional association to give the industry some benchmarks to go by. "In 1990, I organised a group of 30 senior players in the consumer electronics industry to get together and discuss the burgeoning home automation industry and the need for an independent association. Many meetings and three years later, CEDIA Australia was established," he says.

CEDIA Australia made history by being the first international branch from CEDIA in the US. "They've (CEDIA US) always viewed this as being significant," Billington adds, "It indicates how progressive Australia is, by recognising the need for an association before Europe, South America or Canada."

One-stop solution

So with a passionate and motivated managing director, SHS has been working in the home automation industry for the past ten years. The company is very 'design and engineering' focused, providing customers with a comprehensive design package prior to the commencement of any project.



The team at SHS from left to right - **Stephen Broholm** ; senior design consultant, sales, project manager & installer, **Frank Gergelifi** ; operations manager & projects co-ordinator, **Jenny Billington** ; administration, **James Billington**; managing director, **Mark Pearsall**; senior programmer & installer, **Adrian Hallstrom** ; design engineer, project manager & installer.

Billington says the team is made up of an operations manager who is also the project coordinator. Then there's the design engineer who provides project management, design documentation and is savvy with high-level audiovisual systems.

Another member of the design team is a qualified electrician, project manager and installer. The senior programmer has mastered the complexities of interfacing Crestron with lighting control backbones from Dyalite, C-Bus, HPM I-Control and a multitude of other essential services. Billington says SHS is keen on making sure projects are completed on time and "well beyond the client's initial expectations."

Billington says they usually select a Dyalite or Clipsal C-Bus lighting control system as the backbone for other essential systems to be integrated with. "Control panels are provided within in each room, with sufficient buttons to operate the services required within that location", he adds.

"We gain the support of interior designers and architects, by eliminating the need for the proprietary wall switches that individual services require, thus reducing wall clutter," he says.

SHS also prides itself on providing a one-stop solution for their clients. Billington points out the company's systems include: intelligent lighting; multi-zone video/audio; Structured cabling; communication; RF distribution; integrated service panels; telecommunications; access control; security CCTV; home theatre and the ability to integrate essential services such as air conditioning; motorised drapes; floor heating and heated towel rails just to name a few.

Humble beginnings

When looking at how the industry has evolved Billington says: "From humble beginnings in the 1960's with traditional stereo systems, the industry has become more sophisticated with advent of home entertainment systems during the 80's, including stereo VCRs, CD players and CRT projectors."

"During the 90's, we saw DVD players, plasma TVs and LCD projectors take home-theatre to another level. Since 2000 emerging technologies especially the IT Industry, have added to the choices. The do-it yourself market has always been catered for by the chain stores but SHS is set up to help those requiring custom installation by professionals," he adds.

Billington says at SHS, "we design home theatres in dedicated rooms, taking a close look at the acoustics, the soundproofing, tiered seating for premium viewing—as well as the electronics."

He adds SHS carries out most of its marketing by delivering presentations to architects, designers, developers and builders—presenting themselves



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as a solution provider. "We avail ourselves to these companies and update them every six months on changes," he adds.

"We also do quite a lot of project profiles for newspapers, magazines and TV lifestyle shows—we often provide them with a house where we show them what we've done and this way we get coverage," he adds.

Keeping up with the Jones'

To keep up with trends within the home automation industry, Billington says SHS has appointed an operations manager who has in turn delegated staff to be responsible for different disciplines via sources such as the Internet. This information is collated by each person responsible and then presented at team meetings for further evaluation.

"We also evaluate relevant offerings from credible suppliers. Then there are the industry magazines as well, including an ever-increasing number of smart home titles.

When asked how SHS ensures each staff member is kept up-to-date with all the current training, Billington says he makes sure his all his staff attend the CEDIA EXPO training courses each year at the Gold Coast, as well as manufacturer and supplier training.

"We also conduct internal meetings to evaluate the latest developments in new products and technologies," he adds.

Future trends

As far as future trends for the home automation industry, Billington says he thinks some of those already in place are media centres as libraries for CDs, DVDs and photos.

"Smart home options are already being offered by project home developers," he says. "It's only a matter of time before more people choose the smart option rather than the conventional one. This gives provision for future systems to be included in the network," he adds.

Finally, if Billington had to choose one word to sum up the future of the home automation industry he'd say—"Ballistic."

"Industry research reported at the recent CEDIA EXPO indicates enormous growth as more consumers become aware of their options. As more products from more companies reach the market, costs are decreasing and more developers and home builders will find the smart solution economically viable," he cites.

"Developers of single-unit and multi-unit projects look for that point of difference. A few years ago the big buzzwords in home building were 'granite' and 'marble'—now you hear about 'the smart home'." **SHI**