

Dealerscope

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INTERVIEW BY GRANT CLAUSER

CHECKOUT

BUILDING ON MOMENTUM

Microsoft's Scott Evans speaks to Media Center's benefits in the residential market

Even before the launch of Windows Media Center Edition a few years ago, Microsoft has been working to position itself as an entertainment experience company rather than just an IT company. With the rollout of Vista this year, the success of its Xbox360 game console and the expansion of its operating system into Media Center Extender and Microsoft Home Server, the entertainment IT company wants to convince the custom installation market that Media Center can be a robust and easily integrated platform for serving up a complex audio, video and control experience for residential users. To explain Microsoft's new push into this market, we sat down with the Scott Evans, Microsoft's E-Home manager, during Denver's CEDIA Expo.

Dealerscope: Microsoft has been involved in the CEDIA market peripherally for a few years but is making a much bigger push now. Why?

SE: We've seen Media Center interest growing in the CEDIA channel where we're seeing more companies building products and delivering more of the digital home vision via Media Center, so we wanted to come to CEDIA Expo and help support the momentum with our partners and custom installers who are doing deployments based on Media Center.

Specifically, we're really excited to see the whole end-to-end digital home solution based on Media Center. The average consumer going to a retail environment may be just getting a Media Center and an extender in one room, while here in the custom-install market we often see whole home solutions with extenders in every room of the house integrated with home automation solutions and other home products and really delivering much more of that digital home solution.

DS: Some consumers might feel cautious about depending on a PC to run their home theater. How does use of an extender change that?



SE: One of the ways we're showing Media Center a little differently here at CEDIA is we're actually using rack mount media centers from some of our partners like Niveus, Lifeware and Alienware. Those rack mount systems are put in a closet of the house and are really the entertainment backbone, and the customer only really interfaces through the extender devices.

The extender devices are focused on just the consumer electronics user interface experience. There's no complexity of having a keyboard and mouse or other Windows features on their television. It's really just the entertainment experience.

DS: How does using the Media Center Extender to power your content distribution around the home differ from the many other solutions or other products that shuffle content around the home?

SE: The big difference is that Media Center is itself a platform. We have a number of partners, both on the hardware and software side, writing to that platform so you see a variety of companies using it. Russound has their new Smart Media console line Media Centers and those actually ship with support to interface with their whole home audio solutions. So that's a great example of partner innovation and building on the platform. And we have a number of innovations happening on the

software side as well—everything from our new Internet TV service to third-party applications and add-ons like Vongo, Movielink and Comedy Central's Mother Load. Specific to this channel, partners like Lifeware are building home automation solutions that are really just software add-ons to the Media Center platform.

DS: A lot of what we've been seeing is entertainment focused, but most of what the custom installer is looking at now is about home control and automation. How does Media Center fit into that space now?

SE: We have a lot of partners that are taking the Media Center as the entertainment experience for the house and building on top of that to deliver home automation and integration. So you'll now see products that you can actually use as a user interface to Media Center on every television to control the home, control the light switches, check the front-door camera all right from the same interface in your television.

DS: What training are you providing for the installers to get them up to speed on Media Center and Extenders and how they can incorporate this into their businesses?

SE: Here at the show we're having four manufacturer training classes targeted at

custom installers who aren't yet using Media Centers in the residential projects and giving them an education on how to use Media Center in a custom install. We're also launching our Windows Media Center Ultimate Install Competition targeted at the custom installers who are doing great installs with the Media Center.

DS: Microsoft Home Server is a new platform that is a complement to Media Center. Can you tell me more about that?

SE: We believe that home server is very complementary to Media Center in a home environment and especially in a custom-install application. Where the Media Center is the entertainment backbone of the home, recording television shows, distributing those to all the TVs in the house, the home server provides reliable networked-attached storage, whole home backup and remote access.

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