

## Answers to Builders' Top Questions

Starting a new partnership with an electronic systems contractor (ESC) can create anxiety in even the most experienced general contractor. Technology evolves rapidly and keeping up-to-date on the latest trends and options is a full-time job.

A properly certified ESC will alleviate these concerns and ensure your project runs smoothly. Mike Ohman - Power Engineer, Industry Outreach Instructor and CEDIA Certified Electronic Systems Designer with 20+ years experience in construction and audio/video, helps offer some peace of mind for builders who may be asking these common questions.

***Q. I see working with you as risky. Why shouldn't the client just add technology after I am done working with them?***

We understand the appeal from your standpoint; you already have enough to be responsible for. However, bringing in an ESC can positively impact the design and make your project more valuable to your client.

It's easy to think you just need to plan for a few flat-screen TVs - run the some wires, put an outlet on the wall and you're done. But an ESC who comes in early in the process can work with the client to see what they want to achieve in their home, and they may arrive at a solution that gives the client much more overall satisfaction. For instance, rather than having five or six controls in each room, we can integrate the various systems into a central, easy to live with system.

***Q. Can't you bring the price down? After all, it's just a few speakers, a receiver and some TVs.***

Designing home electronic systems properly requires planning, knowledge and expertise. For example, electronic components generate heat, so selecting where to locate the equipment can help make sure it stays cool, adding to its longevity.

Wiring distances, balancing aesthetics with capabilities and costs are just a few of the things we take into consideration. There are highly trained professionals working on the rest of the project, electronics systems should be no different.

***Q. Why do you want to be involved so early in the process?***

Working with an ESC from the beginning may seem like a cause for concern to builders, because they're not always accustomed to working with the subcontractors that early. However, this actually gives the general contractor more control. It keeps the homeowner from bringing in someone who doesn't know your processes, and may not be as qualified as you would like.

I always try to put myself in the client's shoes so I can learn about how they want to live their life. The general contractor, having different processes and perspective, probably won't ask the questions I need to ask in order to deliver what the client needs.

***Q. Why do you want to be involved so early in the process? (continued)***

The builder and the ESI should meet one-on-one early in the process to learn each other's preferences and processes and build the foundation for a relationship.

Depending on the project, an ESC may be involved with not only the audio / video, but also lighting, shades, gate controls, heated driveway, HVAC control, and more. The greater the scope of the project, the earlier the ESC should be involved.

***Q. I don't know what I don't know. How can I trust that you know what you're doing?***

With as fast as technology changes, it can be difficult even for an ESC to keep up-to-date. It may be beneficial for the general contractor to get a top-level understanding of the technology in order to feel more comfortable speaking the language with the ESC and the client. One place to start is by finding a CEDIA Registered Outreach Instructor in your area who offers courses that help give builders, architects and designers a general working knowledge of home technology.

Additionally, any good ESC will have a process. It's their responsibility to educate the general contractor on that process and keep them involved to the degree they choose.

***Q. If you don't deliver, my bottom line will take a hit. How do I know you're not putting me at risk?***

Partnering with a reputable ESC with established processes and a secure business model is the key to minimizing risk. It's important for the general contractor to know the ESC's reputation, their experience, and their longevity in business. It's also helpful to know the product lines they sell, because if the client experiences an issue with the product, they always have the option to go back to the manufacturer for resolution.

***Q. What if something goes wrong after the project is finished? What if the client doesn't like it?***

A good ESC will set manageable expectations from the beginning in order to ensure client satisfaction. Let's take lighting control as an example. As an ESC, I explain to my clients that the lighting control is not going to work exactly as they want it to at move-in simply because they haven't lived with it yet. They'll discover over time that they want changes to the programming based on their usage. That's why they hire an ESC. The lighting control solutions we provide allow the customer to make most changes themselves, without our involvement. By setting manageable expectations at the beginning, we are able to refer back to that point to manage client satisfaction.

***Q. How do I make money on this?***

If you can present the value to your client, it is easy to make money on the process, or at least ensure you are not losing money. It is a process of questioning, teaching, learning and applying the tools of our experience and knowledge to each and every project we do.

There has to be value to the client, and an experienced ESC can help ensure this happens throughout the project.