

Plug In to the Mainstream

Multi-room audio and associated metadata will soon be able to run over the existing electrical infrastructure of a home, which will open huge new doors for custom integrators.



By Chris Westfall

The Renovia Main Source Hub, which delivers high-quality audio and metadata from up to six sources to up to 12 zones. This can go in an equipment closet or somewhere else hidden from view.

A /V solutions based on powerline carrier technology aren't new, but the quality of service from the HomePlug Powerline Alliance changes the game.

Did you ever think it would be possible to send music and metadata over the electrical lines in an existing house? Would you believe that throughput of over 20Mbps would be possible over those powerlines? Believe this: It's right around the corner and, if you'll pardon the pun, it could transform your custom business to serve the enormously untapped retrofit/existing homes market.

You might be skeptical about this powerline

technology, especially if you've had experience with X10. Do yourself a favor, though, and check into what the HomePlug Alliance is doing. This is not X10—far from it. From its inception in 2000, the HomePlug Alliance has focused on one main goal: to use existing powerlines to transmit audio, video and data perfectly. That means no errors. No jitter. No pixilation.

Retrofit & HomePlug: Perfect Alliance

Today, over 165 HomePlug Alliance-certified products are on the market. The Alliance's test results consistently exceed throughput expectations, so the quality issue has been addressed. If you still have doubts about quality, visit www.homeplug.org

and read the white papers and test results for yourself.

Later this year, you'll be able to transmit audio and metadata from multiple sources to multiple zones over powerlines. The best of these solutions will not be retail/DIY; they will be pure custom and will require some high-voltage expertise as well. Usually, installation of these solutions will take a day instead of a week; those reduced timeframes are achievable because the powerlines are your home-run wires. Sound interesting?

New construction is in a coma. Retrofit is where the opportunity is. Prepare for this market shift, for closed-wall retrofit using existing electrical wires for transport. Make sure your busi- ▶

NuVo Bows Site Analysis Tool for Renovia

The Renovia power line carrier (PLC)-based whole-home audio system has been in its beta-program stage and will formally ship in the fourth quarter, but integrators are getting a gift of advance support from NuVo Technologies in the form of a tool that David Rodarte, company president, says will go a long way in "help-



NuVo's David Rodarte

ing our integrators be confident, well-trained, educated and able to do a reliable installation."

"The key," says Rodarte, "is that everything has got to be connected properly – otherwise, there's a very unhappy customer." To ensure that is the case, NuVo has devised a testing tool—the NuVo Site Analysis Tool (NV-RVSAT)—so that custom crews can confirm in advance of the Renovia

install that there are no anomalies—for example, high amounts of unusual noise over the electrical lines, or the ill effects of power bars, which can sometimes short the delivery of the audio signal and degrade signal transmission when the installation is actually done.

"The greatest analogy for this product is a CAT5 tester," he adds. "A good installer does not do an installation without checking all the terminations by plugging in a very simple device to make sure all the connections are proper. When you've got a lot of zones, one wire out of many with a problem could affect the whole system."

The NV-RVSAT is a two-part PLC tester system that includes hub and zone elements, and comes with an easy-to-read OLED display. The installer plugs the hub portion into the location where the Renovia Main Source Hub will be, and moves from room to room with the zone element, plugging that in to evaluate the quality of the signal at each location. A document included with the site analysis tool kit tells installers how to troubleshoot any situation needing attention.

"In studies on the use of PLC over power line, over 95 percent of homes tested worldwide have full and complete signals of the power line carrier, so we don't anticipate many problems," says Rodarte. "It's all about identification in advance of situations where the signal may be poor and not reliable like it needs to be, and knowing what you need to do to correct it. The beauty of our particular tool is that it is truly a design tool."



The Zone element of NuVo's Renovia Site Analysis Tool

HomePlug Alliance

ness isn't left behind as the custom market comes out of its trance, awakened by this new in-home technology solution over powerlines.

Here's the rub, though: Your sales process needs to adapt to this new retrofit opportunity.

Getting Ready for HomePlug

The retrofit market demands, above all, ease of installation. HomePlug delivers "easy" to the homeowner. If price and quality are equal, ease of installation wins. "Easy installation" wins even if it's more expensive, because consumers will pay for convenience. If your solution is easiest, it's not really a fair fight. You can command higher profit margins and service more clients.

What's easy about HomePlug? Installation time is greatly reduced. There is much less risk to the fireplace, or to the wainscoting, and it doesn't matter that there's no attic or convenient place to run wires.



Chris Westfall, NuVo's vice president of sales

Today's luxury homeowners are hungry for new (but proven!) technology. They have been putting off good-sized purchases for several months, and now are looking for ways to quietly and inconspicuously spend on themselves, and on their lifestyles.

They're also looking to "nest", to spend more on their existing homes rather than purchase new ones, or even take on major remodeling projects. Your client won't buy the new house, or the \$70,000 car, or take on the complete kitchen re-do, but what about an investment in their existing home—maybe an add-on to their home theater, or a simple multi-room audio solution?

That's an idea that's far less costly, but still delivers that feeling of "I'm treating myself right!"

Custom A/V can be a great substitute for another purchase that's been put on hold. You will close more deals if the solution is quick, affordable and easy. And if you have your processes in order, you'll



Renovia's local zone amplifier, the discreet box that is installed in each zone of a Renovia system.

see the kind of profit margins that will make a difference. After all, "affordable" only makes sense when it's combined with "profitable"!

Selling the Powerline Retrofit Story

HomePlug technology provides new ways for homeowners to listen, watch and live. You are the expert, the magician, the one who will enable each homeowner to get the latest and greatest with minimal pain and hassle by using the existing electrical wires within the home.

Just think: What is the value of a solution that can be installed in a day or two, instead of a week or two? What's the value to your business and to your employees to install on Monday and get a check on Wednesday?

Don't forget, though: quality still matters, as does integrity, especially from a manufacturer. We have all seen manufacturers sell a dream, and then leave it to you to make it real—or to live the resulting nightmare. Demand more from your manufacturer partner. Make sure you choose ones that have proven they will stand behind your business.

So get ready for this coming revolution. Adapt. Prepare. Make sure you're ready to capture the retrofit market, because it's already starting to turn toward these HomePlug Alliance solutions.

Clinging to yesterday's business model won't bring back yesterday's revenues. Change your approach and establish a new path to profitability with HomePlug. **CR**

Chris Westfall is Vice President of Sales USA for NuVo Technologies (www.nuvo-technologies.com), a HomePlug Powerline Alliance member. Later this year, NuVo will introduce its Renovia multi-room audio solution, which will be based on HomePlug technology. He can be reached at cwestfall@nuvotechnologies.com.



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