

INTERFACE IMPORTANCE

Presenting a pleasing and easy to follow control interface for the end-user is one of the most important aspect of a successful install. *E/* presents some of the latest solutions.



■ AMX has added intercom functionality to third-party controllers to bring them closer in performance to its dedicated controllers

Jonathan Mangnall, sales director, at **AMX**, says: “At AMX, we are committed to delivering the very best user experience. This has never been more apparent than with our latest touch-panels. The new Modero X Series family of frameless, panoramic and widescreen touch-panels redefines touch-panel technology by giving users a new ‘control surface’ on which to perform multiple activities, all at the same time. The Modero X Series combines edge-2-edge glass and a low-profile, to deliver a more usable space and a richly engaging experience.”

Jonathan adds: “But, it’s not just on our own panels that issues of user-experience are important. Since the launch of AMX Apps for Apple and Android OS, smart devices have become a popular control option for our systems and we are equally committed to improving this important platform. The recent addition of intercom functionality allows us to give people an experience which is now even closer to that enjoyed on our own

touch-panels. By affording smart-phone and tablet devices all the functionality of a native AMX touch-panel, we are providing users of larger systems with credible, adjunct control of their automation platform and giving dealers the opportunity to deliver smaller systems, incorporating a world-class, integrated control solution with full feedback and remote access, at a very attractive price-point.”

On the tablet effect, Jonathan says: “The consistency of Apple devices and their ability to offer high-quality metadata in an agile and user-friendly way has undoubtedly influenced the market. The iPad in particular has helped to simplify the user experience and broaden the interest in automation. Consequently more users are exposed to, and have become confident in, touch-screen-based technology as a part of their daily life and this can only be a good thing for the industry.”

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Essential TOUCH-SCREENS

Control4 has recently released the OS 2.1 version of its software platform which provides several new advantages to touch-screen and interface performance. These include Control4's new MyHome Android App and OS2.1 which facilitates the customisation of user interfaces and is already available for PC, iPad and iPhone. The App offers simple control of lighting, temperature, security, music and films direct from the user's handset over a Wi-Fi network. The App also offers unique security features that identify and authenticate the home owners' Control4 system and bind it to their Android device and presents an interface that is consistent with that on Control4's own touch-screens.

The new OS2.1 also allows dealers to deliver customised user interfaces for Control4 touch screens using the Themes SDK. Control4 says the process is simple and cost-effective, meaning dealers can give their customers unique interface screens in every room of the house at nominal expense. Themes are delivered to Control4 touch screen and on-screen navigators through the 4Store.

The growth in the use of third-party control hardware has been THE major issue of the last 12 months and Randy Newkirk, director, technical product marketing at Control4, says: "We anticipate we will see a blend of tablets and smart-phones with dedicated touch panels for some time to come. Much of this will come down to lifestyle and preference, some people always have a smart-phone at hand, so this would be a natural choice, but in other situations a dedicated device is more user friendly."

"For example, a child might wish to use a tablet to play a game in their room, or a parent to take their smart-phone away on business, and it then becomes impossible for the rest of the family to control the home's lighting or security settings. Some people may not accept having to wait for the App to boot on a third party device and others will feel uncomfortable relying on any third party device for mission critical applications such as lighting and security. As a result, I think it's likely there will be demand for a hybrid model and users will choose the methods of interface and control according to their particular situation and how they wish to interact with their homes."

Phil Breitschadel, UK sales manager at **Crestron**, would appear to agree there is much life left in the dedicated controller, he says: "Take one tablet three times a day, with food and your remote controls will be cured? No. This is not the case, the iPad and the smart-phone are amazing accessories - it is impossible to deny that - but they are not a complete controls solution and certainly not the death knell to our controllers, whether that be wireless, remote, in-wall, dock mounted or otherwise."

Phil argues: "Contrary



to some opinions expressed in our industry, the success of tablets, especially the iPad, has actually been extremely positive for Crestron. Touch-screen control has now been put into the hands of a vast new audience. This has created awareness, driven demand, sped up the sales cycle and expanded our markets in a huge way. "Not only that, but it has enabled us to introduce clients to other areas of integration (such as adding on lighting control or security access control to a solution) that was previously out of the client's budget."

Phil adds "I think it is important to remember that these tablet accessories are just that: accessories. They are brilliant in their fashion, but a far cry from substituting a total control solution. Although we are embracing them at Crestron, developing control Apps for both Apple and Android devices, they will never replace the fully functioning and dedicated controllers completely. The primary reason for this is that our clients are still calling for them. They still require tailored controllers for the home and especially for their business needs. One large concern - especially in commercial and education environments (particularly with the iPad), is how to secure them from both theft and accidental damage.

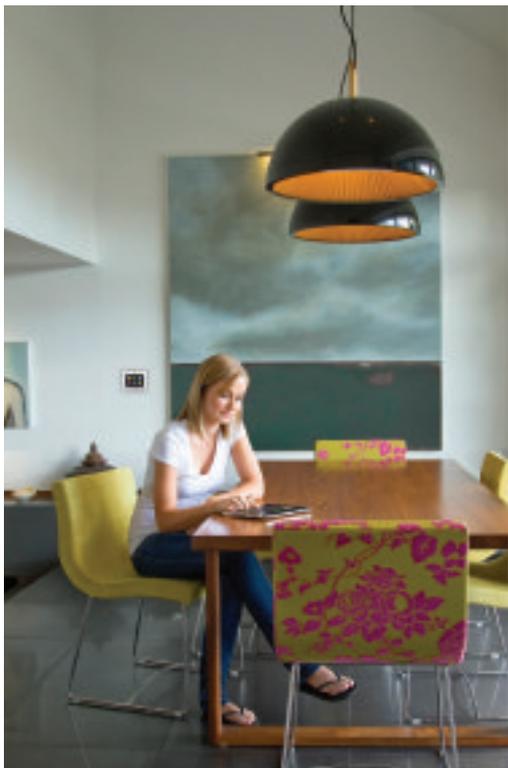
"In fact, in our experience, the controls scene is thriving and, if anything, tablets, Apps and smart-phones have encouraged us and revitalised the market. At Crestron, we have a wide range of control solutions which are now specifically developed for certain applications."

The latest hardware from Crestron includes the 24in V-Panel touch screen which combines full touch screen navigation, high performance graphics and HD video with DigitalMedia 8G connectivity, all on a striking 24in HD widescreen display.

The V24-C can unify all media in the home, lecture theatre or office on to a single HD interface with the addition of Crestron's intuitive control functions.

Crestron has also recently added the Mobile Pro Control App for Android, which is now available on the Android Market. Mobile Pro turns any Android device into a fully functional Crestron touch screen. "Whether you have an iPhone, iPad or Android mobile device, there's a Crestron control solution for you," said Crestron VP of sales and marketing, Robin van Meeuwen. "We're fanatical about keeping our customers on the cutting edge by offering a variety of solutions that bring the latest, most popular home technology into their lives. Our new Android App is just the latest example of that commitment."





David Vukovich, business unit director at **Opus**, also has some strong views on the 'Apple effect': "The application of Apple and Android tablets for home entertainment and control has contributed enormously to consumer awareness of custom install solutions.

"In many cases these devices exceed the performance of far more expensive custom panels, which are now largely irrelevant. Industry adoption of Apple and Android tablets has significantly widened the appeal of smart home systems and delivers great value to end users.

"Whilst this trend gathers momentum, consumer demand for dedicated in-wall controllers remains strong. Installed into the fabric of a home, there is still no substitute for the robustness of structured wired solutions where possible. Providing this infrastructure with in-wall touch-screens adds real value and desirability to a property, remaining a popular choice for developers."

The company says its Opus 6 Series in-wall touch-screens feature a fully customisable interface, which can be easily extended to iPhones and iPads. Once created, this single interface is delivered via the 3.5in and 5.7in Opus in-wall touch-screens, with the 'Opus Remote' App providing replication across Apple iPhone and iPad for complete control continuity. With minimal configuration, the App, available Free from iTunes, has a dedicated iPad version with an optimised high resolution graphics pack, allowing users the convenience to control their system precisely how they choose.

Opus says the immediately accessible features of all-off, lighting, climate and primary control functions are still best served by in-wall touch-screens, as hunting for a remote to dim the lights or mute the audio is neither convenient nor elegant, so installers should consider real-world functionality and accessibility when designing systems to be lived with.

URC, has enjoyed a busy year in the UK, moving to **AWE** in April, the distributor says sales have been on the rise spearheaded by the sleek MX-5000 wand remote using a mixture of IR, RF and Wi-Fi to take charge of the most complicated CI systems. Other highlights include the KP-4000, a versatile in-wall touch-panel run by POE off a single Cat5 cable and retailing for under £500.

Mal Fisher, training manager at AWE, says: "The PSX-2 iPod dock is also popular, not only serving up full two-way browsing to all controls in the network range, it has an unparalleled list of IR commands giving you far more control than the iPod itself can offer. With one button press, you can 'play more from this composer' or set a hip-hop EQ. Is your customer an obsessive Adele fan? Create a single button that starts up the south London songstress every time."

AWE has been training installers regularly on the range since April, and has noticed that some key features of the software are proving particularly popular with installers. Built-in logic with flags, sensors and variables; 10 second set-up of two-way iPod browsing; the fact that 1-way RS232 and IP control are child's play - these are all attracting dealers to create far higher standards of control interfaces than they previously believed possible at this price point, says AWE.

URC has also created a stir of excitement with the promise of its the launch of Total Control planned early next year. A completely separate system from the current models (which will continue), the features include high levels of automation for lighting, heating and AV as well as an innovative approach to cloud and local music distribution, all controlled by a choice of touch-panels and hard-button remotes as well as the ubiquitous iPad and iPhone.

On the iPad invasion, Mal says: "...installers do need to be extraordinarily careful. There's a rash of installations at the moment where the iPad is the only interface between the customer and his lighting, heating, AV and security systems, and I cannot imagine a more dangerous set up. The sheer number of 'what ifs?' would petrify me.

"Say the customer does an upgrade to iOS5, and his heating App stops working. The installer is the one who'll take the call, and can do nothing save telling his hard-earned customer to wear an extra jumper until the App is updated. They can't exactly call Apple technical support for help."

"A control manufacturer recently told me, 'the hard-button remote is dead'. I couldn't stop laughing. The idea that someone actually desires to spend the time swiping a touch-screen and looking away from their TV just to change the channel once is patently foolish. Don't get me wrong. If customers want it, don't say no. It's an inevitable complementary part of today's systems. Just make sure they have the back-up and security of a proper, dedicated control system."

Available from **Polar Audio**, the **CUE** brand offers a range of customisable control system solutions including touch-screens, controllers, keypads and remote controls for the home and hospitality markets.

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Essential TOUCH-SCREENS

The manufacturer has recently launched a range of new touch-panels called the CUEnium 2 series. These panels are wired in-wall, on-wall, on-table or with built-in controller and come in 7in and 12in sized touch screens. CUE also offers the IPCUE range of controllers with a range of different input and output control options.

Another new option is the UniCUE touch panel controllers which allow for both touch-panel interface and control processing in the same unit eliminating the additional cost of a controller remotely located from the touch panel. The UniCUE touch panel controllers come in 7in and 12in touch panel sizes. Each panel controller offers IP control, two bidirectional serial ports RS232/RS422/RS485, four IR/serial outputs four general I/Os (configurable as analogue input or digital open collector output) and two double-throw contacts relays 24 V.

Polar Audio adds that CUE is viewed in the market place as offering something different aesthetically offering its panels in a wide range of finishes and colours from White Birch, Oak, Mahogany to Stardust Black Plastic and Abrasive White Plastic, with a choice of stainless steel or graphite grey front fascia's. Cue can also offer bespoke finishes for when the install requires a customised aesthetic.

Available from **Aldous Systems** the Bitwise control platform has recently benefited from some new templates designed by Custom Code Crafters. The Xenon graphics package to the BitWise Controls platform comes with both the iPad and iPod Touch/iPhone templates packaged together. Bitwise says the packages can be easily imported into its Project Editor software. Supporting both landscape and portrait orientations, each template has a collection of ready-made page layouts ready for customisation.

The package also includes a full component palette and over 80 near photo-realistic icons, multiple backgrounds, and over 1,800 radio and TV channel icons.

BitWise Controls also has Android covered with an App that brings all of the functionality found in BitWise Touch for iOS to devices running Android 2.3 (Gingerbread) or higher.

A relatively recent introduction to the **RGB** line-up the **Savant** Apple based control platform. Leveraging the ease of use that people love about their iPad

or iPhone, Savant is designed to empower dealers with the highest quality control and media distribution products and services that meet the elevated expectations of today's consumer with an evolving taste for technology, while making deployment easier, quicker, more robust and profitable.

The whole system turns around the Savant home automation App, which works across iPads, iPod touch's or iPhones with controls that include user-defined backgrounds and categories, integration and interaction with iTunes multimedia content and security cameras. The platform offers 'iPhone like' navigation and controllers can be handheld or built into the wall. Home control is also enabled via the same control devices whilst away from the property.

The **Comfort Intelligent Home System** from **Cytech** has introduced a versatile new range of designer flush-mounted LCD keypads with a range of interchangeable frames in a variety of materials, styles, and colours. This new KP06 range can be mounted either horizontally or vertically and can be customised to match the styling of the rooms in which they are fitted. Examples of the faceplates include black translucent ABS plastic with its built-in IR receiver that can receive IR signals, Esprit mint coloured glass, chrome, wood and aluminium.

Invision UK has confirmed the availability of **RTI's** free RTiPanel App control interface, bringing the power of RTI's control solutions to the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad.

The App can access an RTI control system locally or remotely, allowing users to adjust audio/video, lights, climate and other integrated systems. Control system programming is stored on the chosen mobile device and updated automatically when any changes are made, using the same Integration Designer software that is used for all RTI products, via a customisable graphical interface.

Optimised for fast connection times, the RTiPanel App supports local connection via Wi-Fi and remote connection via Wi-Fi or 3G, with automatic switching. In addition, it supports the creation of both portrait and landscape views, with minimal extra programming required, as well as supporting full two-way feedback, including cover art, graphics, text, dynamic scrolling lists and more.

The RTiPanel app is available for free from the App Store, with licences available from InvisionUK.



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