



Managing Massive Installation Projects

The Struggle and Glory of Working on Very Large Home Installation Projects

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By **Matt Pruznick**



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Why This Matters

When integrators first take on a big project, they often under-estimate the amount of time that has to go into a project like that.



This home in Hardy, AR, took more than four years to build and features a 14-car garage, four-story indoor climbing wall, industrial-scale indoor deer processing plant, and a big sports court, and huge pool.

Nobody gets into the home integration hoping to just hang a few TVs. In this it's about going big; the dream of equipping an estate with enough tech tools to make you jealous. To work at the intersection of the cutting-edge technology on the largest scale is the El Dorado for which nearly every integrator strives.

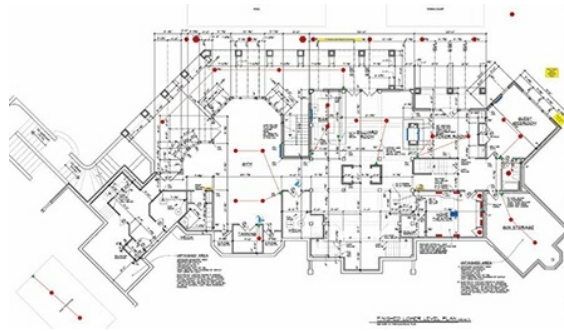
But these mega projects are more than just up installs. With work schedules extending more than three years, these jobs require as much management skill as technical expertise to achieve a successful result, and a happy client.

Mega management is something Ryan Heringer, owner and president of Jonesboro, AR-based Heringer Concepts, knows intimately well. Operating one of the largest integration firms in the South, Heringer has managed the integration of smart homes, dropping residences, like a recently completed 43,000-square-foot home in Hardy, AR.

Featured on television programs such as Fox's Channel's "Clash of the Ozarks" miniseries and Sportsman Channel's Amazing America with Pat and Joanne Palin, the home features the world's largest home automation system, and a ton of things you can't see on TV. Highlights of the home include a 14-car garage, a story indoor climbing wall, industrial-scale deer processing plant, a big sports court, and a pool. "The pool is probably one of the coolest things I've ever done," Heringer said. "They are looking for a Playboy-mansion-style grotto that you can go down underneath and go up into. And it holds a lot of people." And of course, everything is wireless. The home is equipped with touchpanels to control everything from lighting, to music, to video.

According to Heringer, who has done nearly 100 seven projects of this size, the design process is a three-month process. Initially, his design

a Crestron system; however, he changed to provide a more competitive estimate to the contending firm.



This 43,000-square-foot home features the largest ELAN control system ever installed in a residential home.

“They were bidding Crestron, and their bid was different than what residential guys’ are used to. They work on typically smaller projects than residential guys do, just because they don’t understand the change orders and everything goes on in residential, whereas in commercial, you have the plans, here’s what you do.”

And, as it turned out, the construction crew did present some challenges that some commercial side might not have expected. The home took more than four years to complete due to its antediluvian, hand-hewn construction techniques. “They hand made all the beams in it, and didn’t use screws,” Heringer says. “They used like pegs, like a Lincoln Log set. And as they built it together, they used the left and right walls to build it toward the center of the house. So when wiring the house, everything’s central to the walls, so we could start on certain projects, but not connect any wires, as far as prep work, because the walls had to actually be connected.”

In the end, the list of connected items includes nearly 30 flat panel TVs, 26 video zone cameras, more than 300 lighting loads, 24 cameras, and 12 HVAC zones.

“You can’t complete a job like this with extra labor to your budget, because you need it,” Heringer said. “For something to be drawn out over a three- or four-year you need to make sure you have plenty estimated.”

Another integrator with a wealth of experience at the large-scale end of the installation business is Stay, designer at Hoishik, an integration company out of Spring City, PA, a suburb of Philadelphia. With more than 15 years of work on big projects, he’s seen a number of other integrators fail while going for the gusto.



This 15,000-square-foot Colorado ski retreat features full Crest control of additional amenities such as the heated driveway, side melting system.

“One of the challenges that I see that integrators face, is when you first take a project, I think they under-estimate the time that has to go into a project like this.” “I think a lot of guys will get large projects especially when they haven’t done their big dollar amount on the project in the past. I really have no idea how to bid the project, the amount of time and labor and everything goes into it, and in the end they find out they’re not experienced enough to be able to price something like that.” He and his team have programmed some very interesting installations including one that earned an award from

In a 7,000-square-foot home in Chester, he installed a fully integrated Crestron AV distribution system, with a curious twist. The basement of the home features a guest room modeled to resemble a cave, with quartz crystals throughout. The Hoishik team came up with the idea of building on the theme and installed recessed lights behind the crystals. They then rigged a Crestron control system so that when a user inserts an eight-inch quartz crystal into one of five slots in the room, a particular theme is initiated. For example, the theme "Red" illuminates all of the crystals red, the subwoofer rumbles like an earthquake, and the theme "Blue" lights all of the crystals blue and other effects play.

Other large projects undertaken recently by Stay and his team include a 12,000-square-foot home with a Crestron-based automation system, a home simple enough for its 93-year-old resident, and a home replete with a bowling alley, a pool house media room, and a surround sound system.

Beyond an acute awareness of one's own capabilities, Stay advises to be wary of the challenges of coordinating with the multitude of other trades involved in projects of this scale. "When you're an integrator, you've got to count the time you spend with the electrician, the HVAC guys, the pool guys, the sprinkler guy, the spruce guy," he said. "There's so many different people that you have to make sure you understand the scope of what you're responsible for and make sure you have enough billable time for the meetings you have to have with people and get them through."

Denver, CO-based integration firm List Group has been in the integration business since 1980 and has done its fair share of massive projects. List Group recently completed a 15,000-square-foot

Crestron-automated ski retreat with some features tailored to its environment. For the driveway and all of the sidewalks a flatwork is heated, and the home has a power feedback of its electronic snowmelt system. The home also features a bow in its basement, and acoustical treatment mitigation system to dampen the assoc

So what is the key to successfully navigating an install project? According to ListenUp's service manager Ben Larkin, it requires a project grounded when elements of the project become overwhelming. "Fundamentals are the key to success," he said. "Always make a commitment to catch the ball with two hands. Don't neglect with any basic aspect of a project, whether it's engineering, customer experience, project management principles."

For Ryan Heringer, it comes down to preparation. "You don't want to bite off a job like this in your first years in business, or you'll go bankrupt quickly," he said.

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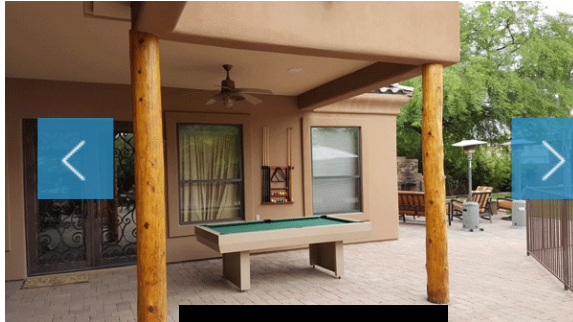
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“With the Niles and ELAN systems in Robert’s new home, there really are no limits,” said Joe Abramo of Custom Automated Solutions.

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