
EDITOR'S I N K

CEBus on the Ragged Edge

Watching the beginning of an industry bears strong resemblance to watching a downhill ski race. The players move at high speed and strain to convince themselves and their spectators that they are in control of the proceedings. A champion's run lifts those who watch to dream of exhilaration and glory. A crash reminds everyone of the risks accompanying the adrenaline rush.

Building automation is not really a new industry. Companies and individuals have been automating commercial and residential buildings for over ten years now. Until very recently, though, most automated buildings **have been** the domains of affluent individuals or firms looking for the prestige, convenience, or very long-term overall energy savings that automation can provide. Current developments promise to open broad new markets to automation. Larger markets, and the major corporate attention they attract, can take home automation away from the exclusivity of the "early adopters" into a major industry.

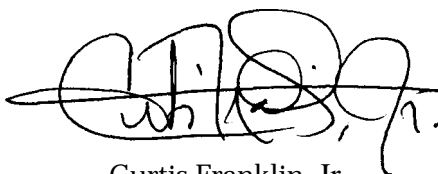
As we put this issue together, we looked at the growing industry and saw signs both encouraging and dismaying. On the positive side, the technology behind CEBus, and the planning which has gone into the proposed standard before its implementation, should speed its acceptance among the general public. In addition to relatively new companies which have sprung up to work with CEBus, many of the respected names in building automation and electrical supply are looking seriously at CEBus to open new markets for their products. In the negative column CEBus is still a proposed standard. No one expects sweeping changes between the current proposal and the final specification, but cautious companies are waiting to see the final standard before committing development money.

Regardless of whether or not it ever truly takes off, CEBus is the best thing to happen in home automation in a long time. As a matter of fact, CEBus has been so beneficial to the industry, that if no CEBus products were ever released, CEBus would still be counted as a Good Thing. How can I make such an outrageous statement? I feel that CEBus has stimulated progress in the two areas where it is most lacking: public opinion and large-company interest.

The popular press has jumped on the news flowing from the CEBus camp and displayed home automation as a technology which will smooth our way into the new millennium. Whether CEBus is up to the task remains to be seen, but the public (read: potential customer) has been given the notion that an automated home is a present possibility for the average family. There are still thousands of individuals who are taxed in trying to program a VCR, so designing automation products which are easily used will be a challenge. The perceived size of the potential market will be the deciding factor in whether the challenge is worth taking up.

Potential market size will also decide who will play the game. We live in a consumer society in which brand recognition is paramount. The effect of companies such as General Electric and Matsushita entering the home automation market will be similar to that of IBM entering the personal computer market. While the big companies will capture significant market share, **their presence** will legitimize **the** field, increasing the size and value of the total market.. Major companies are interested **in CEBus**. After slogging through **the VCR compatibility** battlefield they know **the value** of a single standard to which all products attain. Whether CEBus becomes that standard or not, the companies are sharing ideas on standards which will benefit both consumers and producers. No matter what it is called, there most certainly will be a Home Automation Standard.

I am excited by much of what I've seen in the last few months, and I wish that I could write an uncompromisingly optimistic editorial on the future of home automation. There is tremendous potential, but we live in a complicated society where success for any technical endeavor is far from assured. More homes will be automated—I'm sure of that. We simply won't know the system to be used until all the racers have had a chance at the mountain.



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