

High-end quality at low-end prices

As times get tougher, and less people have access to disposable income, several manufacturers are offering viable and affordable multi-room AV systems.

There's no denying home automation is now akin to electronic plumbing; it's a must have in the 21st century, but it doesn't have to break the bank.

Several manufacturers are now tapping into the lower end of the market, with affordable solutions that allow more and more end-users to embrace connected home technology. Two brands in particular – Leaf Audio and Helsyn – have both produced multi-room AV systems that sell for less than \$3,000.

“The Leaf Home System is a simple one-stop solution for the viewing needs of an average household. It strips back the complexity of traditional systems and comes with everything needed to equip four zones of video distribution complete in the box,” says sales manager Mark Vorstenbosch.

“It can simply plug into an existing Cat5 smart wired house or can be installed from scratch using only one Cat5 cable to each room. No laptop programming is required and the system comes with four learning Altair remotes.”

The Leaf Home System is a four-source, four-zone multi-room system. It is fully matrixed, meaning that any source can be viewed and controlled in any room separately

or be seen in all zones simultaneously. It has full IR routing which enables two identical pieces of equipment to be controlled separately, such as two Foxtel boxes, for example, and it comes with four eight-source multi-function Altair learning remotes.

It requires only one Cat5 cable to each zone and sends video to 576i standard definition digital resolution and analogue and digital audio to each zone. Further, the IR blasters and receivers are all included in the package.

“With most systems, only the unit would be provided, and there would be extras galore. We have removed the headache of trying to work out what's required and simply provided the basic, necessary solution.”

As such, the only tools needed for a full install would be Cat5 crimper cable and ends.

“The best part is all Leaf systems provide considerable margin to the installer, and there is also the possibility of TV sales to go with it.

“Theoretically, an installer could make thousands of dollars by installing this system. Also, the structure that we provide means the installer is less likely to lose money on expensive call backs and fix-ups, thus maximising profit.”

James Hicks of Oceanic Distribution, the

importer and distributor of Helsyn in Australia, tells a similar story.

“The major advantage for installers is that the Helsyn system – a four source, eight zone system – is so easy to install,” he says.

All that is needed is Cat5 to the keypads, speaker cable to the speakers, and that's it for full source control of internal tuner, DVD, and MP3 player out of the box with no programming.

“For a vast majority of the population there is little value in those systems more expensive than ours.

“The only thing that is important to some people is to have a little more control, which is why we sell this product. The other big thing people want are touch screen interfaces and I'm happy to announce that as of late May we added a touch screen to our line up.”

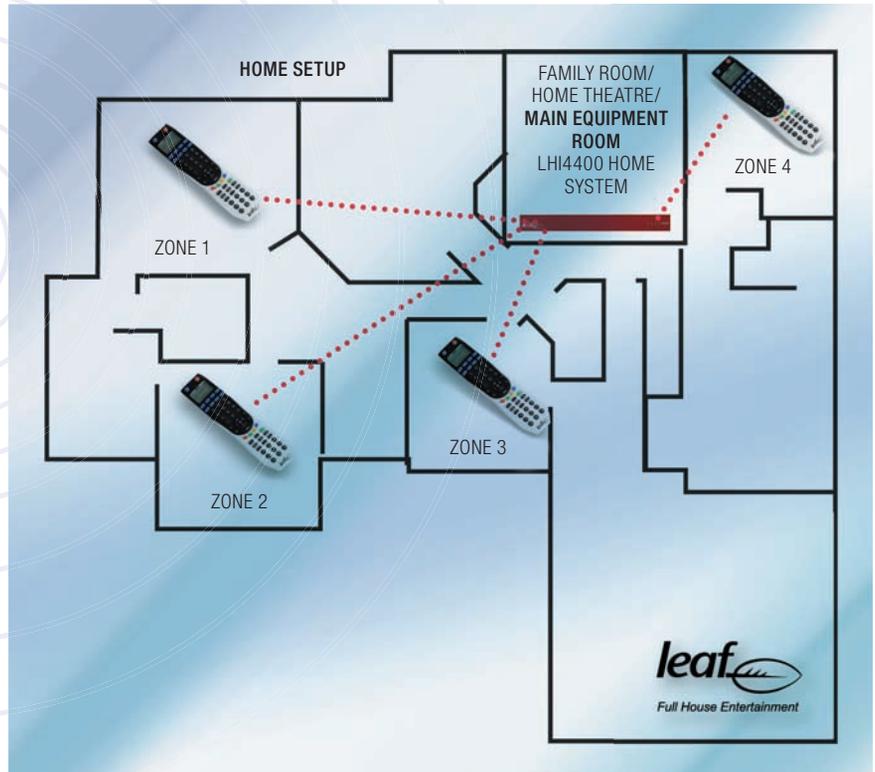
James reports Oceanic is also currently developing a second model of its amplifier with a few extra features.

“The Helsyn brand is manufactured for our company by several suppliers globally, depending on which product range you look at. Ultimately, we wanted to have some competitive products that filled holes in the market so we had these ranges made





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to suit our needs and specifications.

“As such, our multi-room system has eight zones of internal amplification with 100W RMS on the first zone and 30W RMS on the subsequent seven zones. The system also has an internal clock for any auto start-up functions you may require, which are controlled via remote.”

Mark says the huge advantage of buying Leaf product is that there are no expensive middle men raising the prices.

“We are a fully Australian-owned company that designs, engineers and manufactures in Melbourne. There are no extra importing costs associated with most products and we target the market the product is designed for, eliminating costly wastes such as extra functions the end customer may never use.

“Every extra unwanted option that is included adds to the cost. Also, by eliminating expensive configuration issues, we reduce cost. We never compromise on quality or performance, just waste in design. It means that in the end you get exactly what you need at an affordable price.”

The only trade-off, according to Mark, is that the system will either suit your needs or it won't.

“If you need it to be more tailored then there are more expensive options available, including our own Premium and Matrix series systems.

“But lower price points are achieved through streamlining options, not reducing quality. Being an Australian manufactured product I would suggest that the build quality is probably of a higher standard than many other products that would be significantly dearer.”

James says his product line is incredibly competitive because, aside from its price, the quality matches or betters many of his competitors.

“We individually bench test and QC all of the Helsyn multi-room products in Australia before they ship out of our warehouse just to confirm there will be no problems for the installer on the job site.

“The simple reason why our system is so competitively priced is because of our structure. We have the product built to

our specification in China and we buy directly from the manufacturer; if you compare this to many ‘well known’ brands coming from some of the big suppliers in our industry you will notice that they buy from the seller who is having the product made by someone else in China. We cut out the middle man.”

Ultimately, these systems have been designed to suit the requirements of the majority of users. Others may want more but most want a basic, easy to use and reliable system.

“For those with bigger budgets or wants, there are bigger systems,” Mark says.

“But there will be more Toyota Corollas sold each year than Ferraris.” ■

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