

# It's a Long and Winding Road



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**P**ICTURE YOUR STORE'S INTERIOR... COMPETITION AMPS GLEAM BEHIND GLASS. ROWS OF accessories dangle from slatwall. Speakers thump in an interactive sound room, and security and convenience equipment await the next crime-worried customer. Now imagine your store a decade from now... Does your mental image of that future shop look pretty much the same as the real place looks today? If so, chances are you won't be in business 10 years down the road.

You can view business in general, and your store in particular, as either *static* or *dynamic* — and whichever point of view you choose will go a long way toward determining your success.

If you have a static outlook on this industry, you see mobile electronics as moving forward predictably in a straight line. Sound systems will progress from barely breaking the 160dB barrier to making 200dB look like a breeze — but in the end we're still talking about equipment designed to reproduce music at a very high sound level. Security equipment will appear with greater range and ever-more-convenient convenience features — but we're still talking about protecting property from thieves while making life a little easier in the bargain.

Over a year ago, *MER* reported about a small company experimenting with what they were calling a crystal-disk technology that could be used in flat-panel speakers. The story generated an angry letter from a reader who said that the very idea was preposterous. He was both appalled and furious that we would even print such a thing. This was someone who views our industry as unchanging and unchangeable.

The problem with such a static worldview is that the world is a dynamic place. Things happen out of the blue... You're cruising along thinking that all you need to worry about is interfacing with OEM equipment, and then suddenly some tech guy is telling you that one wire no longer controls one function — there's a new thing called multiplexing that's going to change installation as we know it. Or you're considering bowing to the trend and adding navigation equipment to your product line-up and — whoa! — now some computer genius is talking about an aftermarket in-car unit called the AutoPC that has the potential to do everything but brush your teeth.

The retailer with a dynamic outlook might not be able to predict such developments, but he is not likely to be knocked off balance by them. Such a person sees progress in our industry not as a safe, predictable line, but as a winding road full of fascinating opportunities — an electronics evolution. He is constantly looking out for the next turn in the road, the next unthinkable technology, the next unexpected trend.

We spoke with many such forward-looking retailers at CES in Las Vegas. Some have teamed up with competitors for special install projects or are aggressively adding mobile entertainment to their product mix. Many told us of plans to add home installation to their already successful mobile install bays.

Forget about whether they see their stores the same a decade from now. These guys don't see their stores operating the same a *year* from now. They've got their eyes on the road ahead, and they're not looking back. Watch for their stories in *MER* in the months to come. **MER**

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