

Ask the expert



I'd like to get a home theater system but am not sure I'd be able to set it up.

A new home theater system is exciting but has its share of pitfalls for professionals and novices, many of which are avoidable through preparation and forethought. These installation tips are from Paul Holstein, chief operating officer of **CableOrganizer.com**, a provider of home theater cable, wire and equipment management solutions:

1. Account for power requirements.

Make sure that your home's circuits can handle the power load placed on them by home theater devices. Before you plug in and run all of those audio/video components, find out how much power you have running to your home theater room, as well as the amount of power that will be drawn by the electronics. If the load is too heavy, reconfigure your equipment so that you don't blow the circuit. If you're in doubt about power capabilities for a home theater, there's no shame in having a professional assess the situation.

2. Go easy on cables.

It's only natural that you're going to delicately care for expensive top-of-the-line home theater components like screens, DVD players and audio equipment, but you need to treat cables gently too. Cables are responsible for transferring all the necessary signals between home theater devices. It doesn't matter how great the equipment is; if your cable is bent or crushed, the signal will be impeded and the audio/video quality won't live up to its full potential. Cable stress is usually the result of improper installation, but

most problems can be avoided by observing two rules:

■ No sharp angles. If you need to work cable into or around a corner, don't force it to form a sharp 90-degree angle. That sort of kinking

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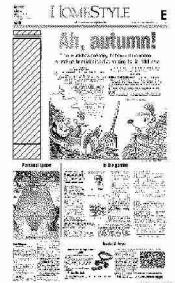
interrupts audio/video signals during their journey from Point A to Point B and will leave you with garbled pictures and sound. Instead, allow cables to gently curve or sweep into relaxed bends that will allow signals to flow freely.

■ Don't squish cables. Stapling to the wall or floor is a common method for keeping coaxial cable secure and out of the way, but you need to watch how it's done. The wrong types of staples can dig into cables, damaging insulation and impeding signal flow. To avoid cutting off circulation, either use staples specifically designed for use with coaxial cable or go with an even better option: surface raceway. This is a system of tubing or other protective channeling used to route cables through the room, when going through walls or under floors isn't an option. It keeps cables neat and organized and won't leave holes in your wallboard.

3. Don't forget surge protectors.

Installing a new home theater can turn into quite an investment. But no matter how much you've already spent, don't connect all those audio/video components until you've invested in surge protection. Home theater electronics have the power to give you a larger-than-life viewing experience, but they're extremely delicate. One good power surge can be all it takes to fry audio/video components beyond use. By plugging everything — from a high-definition screen to a sound system — into surge-protected power distribution units (PDUs), you help to ensure that home entertainment components aren't wiped out in one fell swoop.

4. Give your equipment room to breathe.



Electronics tend not to function well when they're overheated and kept in close quarters. Correct spacing and thermal management of audio/video components are key elements for a smooth-running viewing room. Be sure to consult manufacturers' specifications to see how much clearance is recommended for each piece of equipment. Rack-mount fans are a terrific option for home theater thermal management; they'll help keep equipment cool and going strong.

5. Keep dust in check.

Dust interferes with the functions of home theater components. If left to build up, it can drastically shorten the life span of audio/video equipment. If your home theater components are housed in an open entertainment console, be sure to dust them thoroughly and often.

6. Save warranty documents.

In the excitement of setting up new home entertainment equipment, you may be tempted to tear into boxes and start throwing around packing material and instruction manuals. But be sure to find and hold onto paperwork for manufacturers' warranties. Register your equipment with the manufacturers as soon as possible, then store all the documents together in a safe place for quick and easy reference. This will save you time and frustration in the event that one of your components malfunctions.

To learn more, visit **CableOrganizer.com** or call (866) 222-0030.