UP-SELLING TO REVERSE THE DOWNWARD TREND:
How the Schneider Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens is bringing profitability back to the Home Theatre business

Interview participants:

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Ken Whitcomb, President, Calibrations, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

This report is provided as a service to Home Cinema Dealers and Representatives.

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While the downturn in the economy has generally not spared the home theatre industry, forward-thinking reps and dealers are bucking the trend and finding new profitability where opportunity remains strong -- at the high end of the market. Here, clients seeking the ultimate home cinema experience are embracing the full-screen 2.35 (Cinemascopé®) superwide format. At the heart of this solution is the Schneider Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens System, which is unparalleled in its ability to deliver a superior Home Cinema 2.35 experience.

“One of the last technical issues attenuating the true movie experience at home was the ability to display superior-quality superwide 2.35:1 images,” explained Schneider Optics Director of Home Cinema Sales and Marketing Dan Drook. “Now the reality is that many of our reps and dealers are making it happen every day, using the Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens System as the cornerstone of home cinema packages in which customers specify high-end products and technology throughout, for the ultimate home cinema experience.”

The Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens System enables 16:9 digital projectors to fill the entire height and width of 2.35:1 format screens with cinema-quality images, eliminating the letterbox black bars that typically frame the image when a 16:9 projector with a conventional lens projects a Cinemascope movie. Letterboxing not only wastes screen space, but also reduces the effectiveness of the digital projector, explained Bob Dorrance of Dorrance Audio Marketing. “When a Cinemascope movie is projected onto a 16:9 screen, 30 percent of your projector’s pixels are wasted on creating horizontal black bars,” he said. “What’s the sense of investing in a good 1080p projector if you’re not going to maximize its capabilities? The Cine-Digitar Anamorphic system enables my clients to completely fill 2.35:1 screens with cinema-quality images featuring the full resolution and brightness their projectors are capable of delivering.”

Without the Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens

Conventional 2.35:1 image on a 1.78:1 (16:9) screen results in unsightly black bars and unused pixels (lost resolution)

With the Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens

Full height and width of 2.35:1 superwide format screens are filled without distortion, delivering maximum resolution with no black bars
The excitement of home theatre is back!

In the years since mass-market large-screen televisions and projection systems began making the concept of "home theatre" a reality for so many, the industry has become somewhat commoditized – much to the detriment of reps and dealers. "Twenty or even ten years ago, the idea of a home theatre was still special in and of itself," said John Brusa of Image Tech Design. "In recent years it's gotten to the point where everyone knew big screens were out there, and everyone either had one or knew someone who did – there was simply no 'new' story to tell. Now, with the Cine-Digitar anamorphic lens projecting these amazing full-screen Cinemascope images, there's actually something exciting in the demo room again!"

Bob Dorrance agreed, adding "The reality is that the profitability of selling flat panel TVs is gone, and it's become very difficult to make a living selling LCD or Plasma televisions. As for projection systems, a consumer can buy a 10-foot screen and a hi-def 1080p projector for about five thousand dollars, and think they're getting great home cinema. Unfortunately, there's not much margin there at all for the dealer, but beyond that, the consumer may have the resources and the inclination to go for a much better, higher end package – they're just not aware that this amazing wide-screen capability is out there and available."

That lack of awareness changes to become great interest with every awe-inspiring live demo of the Cine-Digitar anamorphic lens system, according to Peter Lazarus of P.D. Lazarus & Co. "The demo makes the difference," he explained. "We'll sit the potential customer down in the chair and show HDTV in the standard 16:9 format on the larger screen (with side columns or masking), and they think it looks great. Then I'll switch to a 2.35 movie in the same space, with letterboxing and columns, and they think it looks great. But then I'll hit the button and the Cine-Digitar lens slides into place, and the entire screen fills up with this incredible image, and their jaw drops open. It's over – I don't have to say another word. For the first time in a long time, a demo actually means something."

Brusa follows the same demo chronology, with the same results. "When those side maskings open up and that lens comes across, and the full screen fills with this bright, sharp, huge image, the 'WOW' factor is off the charts," he said. "You really don't have to 'sell' it at all once you can actually show it."

Offer a home cinema “experience,” not just equipment

While it’s clear that the market for standard home theatre installations has leveled off, targeting more discerning clientele with a true 2.35 home cinema experience is enabling astute reps and dealers to grow their businesses even during the present economic downturn. "There are plenty of folks out there who still want what nobody else on the block has, and home cinema 2.35 is the leading edge right now. It really has become a revolution," explained Dorrance.

The key to providing the ideal installation for both dealer and client is to package a true home cinema "experience," rather than simply spec line item home theatre equipment and accessories. "You're selling a full experience, one that still only a relative few home theatre owners are able to enjoy and boast about," said Brusa. "I've found that by focusing on the total superior experience, rather than focusing the conversation on the ‘stuff’ going into it, the overall cost of the installation equates to a value that the client can relate to and want to purchase."

Being one of the still relatively few reps or dealers able to provide such a superior home cinema experience pays strong dividends, according to Dorrance. "Whereas the dealer down the block might be selling that five-thousand dollar projector and 10-foot screen, my dealers are putting together home theatre packages where the projector, lens and screen together can run from 20- to 30-thousand dollars," he explained. "When a customer is interested in making that kind of investment for a superior optical system, we find that they're also interested in having the dealer spec in a higher-performance audio system, a better control system, better seating – it simply elevates the whole ticket for the dealer, while giving the customer the best home cinema experience available today. It's just a win-win all around."

Invest in success

To those reps and dealers offering a 2.35 home cinema experience with the Schneider Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens System, the future of the industry – and the key to renewed profitability -- is here today. "Being able to provide 2.35 home cinema with this lens system puts you in the thick of the upscale home theatre business, and the opportunity right now is tremendous," explained Lazarus, while pointing out that for those who have done so, the cost of creating or retro-fitting a showroom to enable full-screen 2.35 capabilities was small in comparison to the results yielded. "A great number of
dealers realize that this is heralding the future and it’s where they’ve got to go, but they haven’t mobilized the resources yet to make it happen. The ones who have gotten on board and have set up a demo room with 2.35 capabilities are absolutely ahead of the curve, and ahead of the pack.”

Brusa agreed. “Any dealer interested in getting on board with the Cine-Digitar Anamorphic system would be at a great disadvantage without a demo room,” he said. “If you can show it, you can sell it – it’s that simple.”

“I’ve got 11 dealers on board, already demo-ing the Cine-Digitar Anamorphic system for their customers, and 3 more dealers bought the system this week,” added Dorrance. “I’ve been able to convince my dealers that the investment in setting up a showroom with wide-screen capabilities is a smart business move, and it’s paying off for them.”

For those hesitant to embrace the future of the industry by offering 2.35 home cinema capabilities, Dorrance’s advice is succinct: “If you call yourself an AV specialist, you need to be in this 2.35 category. If you’re not, you’re just selling big TV sets.”

A professional presentation from start to finish
To deliver the demo room ‘WOW’ factor, it’s critical to ensure that the room and the optical components are properly set up to achieve the optimal picture quality. Considerations include screen position and projector placement/mounting, lens alignment and additional factors unique to each room. While Schneider Optics provides installation and calibration guidance and technical data, bringing in a professional calibrator such as Ken Whitcomb of Calibrations, Inc, for your demo room set up can pay lasting dividends, both in the showroom and at future customer installations.

“Some dealers without previous anamorphic lens system training just need one session with an expert calibrator to be able to go into an installation and provide a great 2.35 image,” said Whitcomb. “Bringing in that expert and getting that experience during the setup of your own demo room makes you that much more prepared to handle your clients’ installations.”

Understanding a few basic concepts can go a long way toward ensuring the ideal picture in each installation, according to Whitcomb. “Getting the projector mounted correctly, absolutely parallel and perpendicular to the screen is one of the keys – and one of the first places untrained dealers go wrong,” he explained. “Physical alignment is critical, simply because any initial geometric distortion gets amplified with an anamorphic lens. By having an expert pro set up your showroom, with your installers present, you give yourself that much of a head start toward ensuring a painless installation and a perfect picture for your clients.”

The Schneider Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens System includes two elegantly simple yet rugged motorized solutions for deploying the lens. The Kino-Torsion and Kino-Linear mechanisms feature adjustments for displacement, pitch, yaw and roll, for easy precision lens alignment. Remote deployment is possible using a 12-volt trigger or contact closure.

A wealth of information is available at www.schneideroptics.com, including PowerPoint presentations on Home Theatre Anamorphic Conversion, and A Brief History of Wide-Screen, as well as a Projector Minimum Throw Ratios Chart to help determine the optimal projector placement with the Cine-Digitar Anamorphic 1.33x Lens System in any room.

Getting on board
According to Bob Dorrance, “If you don’t sell the ultimate 2.35 home cinema experience to your customers, soon enough someone else will.”

If you’re interested in learning more about improving your rep or dealer business with the Schneider Cine-Digitar 1.33x Anamorphic Lens System, contact Dan Drook at ddrook@schneideroptics.com.

We offer our sincere appreciation to those who contributed their knowledge to this report:

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