



Advice on home theater, audio, and video

Sound ... & Vision

Q. I read that the newer HDMI version 1.3 effectively solves the lip-sync issue that can sometimes pop up in HDTV broadcasts due to the digital audio being quicker than the video. I am considering a receiver upgrade. Would you recommend looking for a receiver with HDMI 1.3?

SHAWN CRANDALL / VIA E-MAIL

A. A.G. says: You're right: High-definition video requires more intensive processing on the part of your TV than digital audio, which is why you'll sometimes get a time lag as long as 50-100 milliseconds when watching high-def programs — enough to cause a visible gap between picture and sound (the lip-sync problem). HDMI 1.3 can correct for

this issue by identifying lip-sync problems within the device chain and instructing components to compensate for them. For example, a TV requiring 50 ms of audio delay to sync up sound and picture can communicate that information to an A/V receiver, which delays the signal accordingly. Since you're looking to upgrade your A/V receiver anyway, you should consider a model with HDMI 1.3 switching. (Models with that capability should arrive sometime in mid-2007.) But to take advantage of the lip-sync correction feature, you'll need both a receiver and a TV with HDMI 1.3 connections.

Intermittent Tweeter

Q. I have a pair of tower speakers. When I first turn on my amp, I get no sound from

the ribbon tweeter in one of the towers. I can get the drivers working by turning the volume up, and once it's working, I can turn the volume back to listening level and things work normally until I power down at the end of the day. Is my amp at fault or the speaker? Would switching amp/speaker connections fix it?

SEAN ECHEVARRIA / SAN MATEO, CA

A. I.G.M. says: Since it's only in one channel, you can eliminate (or confirm) the amplifier as the culprit by swapping the left and right connections. If the problem shifts to the other channel, the amp is doing it; if not, it's a problem in the speaker or the wiring between it and the amp. Since the problem only affects the tweeter, it's not likely to be caused by the external wiring unless your speakers are biamped. If they are, tightening up the connections might solve the problem. If that doesn't help, it's mostly likely occurring inside the speaker box, and that will require professional service.

ASK AN INSTALLER

Cat Got Your HD?

Q. I'm about to purchase a whole-house video and audio distribution system and I'm being told that I can transfer HD picture quality around the house using double Cat-5e connections without loss of picture quality. It sounds too good to be true. Is it?

Kapil Wadhvani / via email

A: JOHN CHANCE, Owner, The Home Theater Connection (THTConnection.com), Staten Island, NY, says:



Yes, it's true. It's accomplished by using what's called a video balun, and it can support HDTV (720p, 1080i/p) transmission via component video converted to Cat-5e with wire runs up to 1,000 feet.

Video baluns convert unbalanced video into a balanced signal format that's more immune to noise and interference, and can be transmitted over long lengths of Cat-5e with very little signal loss. Two-piece systems, with a transmitter on one end and a

receiver on the other, can be purchased from companies such as Knoll Systems (knollsystems.com) and AudioControl (audiocontrol.com). These typically include connections for transferring audio as well, hence the double Cat-5e you mention.

Of course, once you have video in your remote rooms, how will you turn your source components on and off or change channels? Radio frequency (RF) remote controls or IR repeaters will do the trick. But that's a whole other topic! (For more on baluns and extended cable runs, see "For the Long Run" in "Feedback," page 10.)

Firmware Issues

Q. I just bought an HD DVD of the movie *Spartacus* and a note with it said that I might need a firmware update. What exactly is a firmware update?

NICHOLAS TAMERIUS / SASKATOON, CANADA

A. A.G. says: Firmware is a term that comes from the PC world and can be generally defined as a software component in a hardware device. In most cases, the firmware of a given product such as an HD DVD or Blu-ray Disc player resides on an internal storage chip. The data on the chip can be erased and programmed with new information — usually supplied via Web download or software on a disc provided by the manufacturer — in a process known as a firmware update. First generation machines like your HD DVD player are bound to require some aftermarket tweaking to ensure that the performance is up-to-date, as well as guarantee compatibility with other electronics gear and new software releases. That's why Toshiba, for example, has issued at least two firmware updates during the past year for its HD-XA1 and HD-A1 HD DVD players. **S&V**

Have a question about audio, video, or home theater? Send e-mail to soundandvision@hfmus.com (put "Q&A" in the subject line) or regular mail to Q&A, Sound & Vision, 1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. Please include your name, street address, and phone number for verification; only your name, city, and state/country will be printed. Sorry, but only questions chosen for publication can be answered, and all letters are subject to editing at our discretion.