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Buying a Home Theater Receiver

By Kenny Hemphill

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Buying a receiver is one of the most important decisions you're going to have to make when building your home theater. The receiver has a number of functions including; connecting and switching audio sources; connecting and switching video sources; decoding surround sound formats; amplifying an audio signal and sending it to your speakers; tuning in to radio stations; and acting as the interface between you and your home theater.

The first thing to think about is whether you want a receiver at all or would you be better off buying a separate decoder, amplifier, and tuner?

Despite being a more expensive route – not to mention the extra space needed – separates do have some advantages. You can pick and choose your own combination of components, can upgrade each component individually and won't lose all the functions if one piece develops a fault. On top of that, having each electronic component in a separate box does improve sound quality when compared with having them all on one circuit board.

However, the separates route is more expensive, more complicated and needs more space than buying a receiver. And for most people its unnecessary. Today's receivers do a very good job in all of their functions.

So what should you look out for when buying a receiver? The first thing is to make sure that it has ll the inputs you need for the equipment you need to connect to it. Sounds obvious, but its very easy to overlook. As a mimimum it should have digital audio inputs (optical and co-axial) for Dolby Digital and/or DTS. It should also have analogue audio inputs for CD player, set-top box and possibly DVD-Audio or Super Audio CD player (the last two currently don't have digital outputs in order to make it less easy to pirate CDs).

You should also consider whether you want to route all your video sources such as TV, DVD player, and games console through your receiver. Doing so means you can switch between sources from one controller, very easily. But if you want to do this you'll need to make sure the receiver you're interested

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in has enough video inputs. These could be S-Video or component inputs are best, or if you're in Europe, Scart. You should also make sure the video output from the receiver is of high quality, so again, it should be S-Video, component or Scart.

If you can test a receiver before you buy, its worth comparing the quality of a video signal from a DVD player when its connected directly to a display and comparing it with when its connected via the receiver. There shouldn't be any noticeable difference in quality.

The power rating of the amplifier is also important. The bigger the room you have for your home theater, the more power you'll need. And makes sure that the power rating is quoted in Watts per channel – the last thing you want is to get home with your 100Watt receiver and discover that its power is split between eight speakers in you 7.1 set-up. It's impossible to specify how powerful your amplifier

should be, but if your home theater is in a reasonable-sized room, as opposed to an aircraft hanger, 100Watts per channel should be fine.

Finally, don't forget the remote control. It's the key interface between you and the reciever and you'll spend a lot of time using it. So make sure it's comfortable and straightforward to use. The last thing you want is to have to spend ages wading through on-screen menus to get what you want.

Kenny Hemphill is the editor and publisher of

Home Theater Audio Setup

By Matthew Seigneur

Home Theater Audio Setup by Matthew Seigneur

Your home theater audio setup will depend on the space available to you, what kind of signal your receiver can carry, and the number of speakers you have. With proper setup, it doesn't matter if you have a simple stereo audio setup or a complex multi-speaker setup. Proper home theater audio setup will give you the most enjoyable experience.

The first step to proper home theater audio setup is if you have a tile, hardwood, or any other non-carpeted floor, to put down an area rug. Hard floors may look nice but they affect acoustics poorly.

The second step in home theater audio setup is to place your speakers. For a stereo setup, placement is simple – one on either side of the viewing area. For Dolby Digital 5.1 or Surround EX, however, you must take extra considerations into mind. Your center speaker should either be on top or below your display and facing your primary viewing position. The left and right front speakers should be on either side of the screen, preferably at ear level, at about a 45 degree angle from the center of the viewing position.

If the seating is meant for more than one person, all three of the front speakers should be placed in a

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straight line. Surround speakers should be placed slightly to the rear of and alongside the seating, a few feet above head level when sitting. If the surround speakers must be placed behind the seating, experiment with pointing the speakers at an angle so that the sound coming from them seems to 'surround' the viewer. If you have a subwoofer, place it wherever is most convenient, as it's placement is not critical to sound reproduction.

When you are using Dolby Digital 5.1 or Surround EX, it is necessary to continue your home theater audio setup by configuring your receiver. Unless you have tower speakers, all main speakers should be set to 'small'. Low frequency effects and bass should be set to subwoofer if you have one. DSP modes should be turned off. Read the user manual to find out how to change these settings and to double check any special requirements you receiver might have.

With proper home theater audio setup, you can have a truly enveloping aural experience.

... and don't forget to get your speaker stands at:

<http://www.home-theater-reviews.co.uk/design-setup/speaker-stands.shtml>

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