



Crestron AV Control Provides Entertainment at Sir Richard Branson's Caribbean Home

Necker Island retreat provides stress-free audio and video to Virgin Group billionaire

Background

The life of a celebrity billionaire is complicated enough, but when Sir Richard Branson is ready to relax in his home, he wants things simple.

Branson, owner of Virgin Atlantic Airlines, Virgin Records and 400 other companies, is a soft-spoken, unassuming man in private, says Rusty Henderson, partner in electronics integration company, Think Simple Limited.

Branson's home is simple as well. His main residence, located on Necker Island, the 74-acre private paradise he owns in the Caribbean, is just three rooms (or rather three small buildings): a bedroom, kitchen and living/entertaining space called the Temple Room, with adjoining spa and swimming pool.

It's true that the setting is extraordinary. Branson can watch the sun rise over the Atlantic and the sun set into the Caribbean from the Temple Room. Though roofed, the space is open to sea breezes and provides almost 360-degree views of the island.

Just over a year ago, Henderson installed new audio/video systems in the residence. "Our main concern was making sure everything was incredibly easy to use," he explains.

The Challenge

Though Branson's entertainment systems are simple, making them work was anything but. "The Caribbean environment is very harsh," Henderson explains. Because the island's salty air is highly corrosive, exposed surfaces and all connections had to be marinised, a process where a barrier material is applied to keep out the salt air.

The second problem was absorbing power variations and possible power interruptions. Necker Island produces its own electricity through two large generators. When power is



switched from one source to another, or if the generators have any problem, the resulting sags, spikes and surges can have a very damaging effect on electronics. For that reason, Think Simple deployed a series of uninterruptible power supplies, which use batteries to filter the power and make sure it's perfectly consistent. These intelligent devices are also able to shut down when not in use, reducing power consumption and utility costs.

The biggest challenge was lightning, a recognized danger in the Caribbean. Because of the concern with lightning, Henderson says Think Simple avoided the use of copper cable whenever possible in Branson's private house, transporting audio, video and Internet signals via non-conductive fiber optics.

The Solution

The key to Branson's entertainment system, according to Henderson, is the use of a control system from Crestron. Think Simple installed two Crestron control processors and tied them into a movie player, DVD player, two LED displays (one in the bedroom and one in the kitchen), a multi-zone sound system with three iPod® docks and a 55" SunBrite® weather-proof TV for the Temple Room.

Branson can choose a movie or TV station, queue up music from his iPod or play a DVD. He also has Internet connections in each living area. "Mr. Branson uses the TV the most and lives off the news and world events," Henderson adds.

The movie player stores Branson's entire movie collection in a single device, with a very easy-to-use interface accessed through the Crestron processor. Branson is able to operate the movie player and the other components using a remote control, which Henderson chose for its extreme simplicity and reliability. Think Simple also installed Crestron Cameo® Keypads in each room as an alternative, in-wall control for the music system.

" This is absurdly good!"

Sir Richard Branson, homeowner

Benefits

Crestron components were also helpful in the harsh Caribbean environment. Henderson says he chose them because of the extreme reliability of the company's products.



Since Branson likes his electronics out of sight when not in use, Think Simple hid loudspeakers in-wall or in discrete locations in the ceilings. They installed subwoofers under the floors, with the sound rising from grills not unlike air-conditioning vents. Think Simple also installed the TV in the bedroom in a teak cabinet, from which it rises and swivels to an ideal viewing position at the touch of a button on the remote control. The pool, too, includes underwater speakers, so Branson and his guests can listen to music or the TV when swimming or relaxing.

Henderson says it took an eight-man crew 28 days to install all the wiring and components, traveling from a temporary base on the nearby island of Virgin Gorda. “We hired two

transport vessels to get the team to and from the island every day. The boats had to be pretty large as we had over 20 waterproof crates full of the equipment and tools required to implement the installation.”

Branson, however, appreciated the effort. His short but sweet comment, “This is absurdly good!”

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