



## PERFORMANCE MEDIA INDUSTRIES, LTD.

Happy Holidays from All of Us at...  
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by A. Grimani

We Americans do love to celebrate! Have you ever stopped to consider that the last three months of our year end with the three biggest holiday events of the year? October goes out with Halloween. November concludes with Thanksgiving. December wraps up with more holidays than even the greeting card companies can count! Through the years, we've gotten pretty good at Halloween and Thanksgiving. Halloween is all about costumes, trick-or-treating, and that which is most important...watching scary movies! (Thought I was going to say eating candy, didn't you?) We have Thanksgiving down pat, too. Families and close friends gather together to eat turkey and watch the Detroit Lions or Dallas Cowboys do battle on the football field. Christmas, along with the other traditional year-end gift-giving extravaganzas, are a different ball of wax. Know what I mean? You have to find perfect, affordable gifts for everyone in your life...all at the same time! The dog may be happy with a new water dish, but what in the world do you give a teenage guy who looks more like a Covenant Elite than a human? (Actually, if the preceding sentence made sense to you, he will probably like your gift.) More importantly, what do you get for a home theater enthusiast?!

I can't help with the teenagers and dogs (no connection intended), but there are a few things here and there that home theater buffs might really like to pull out of their stockings on December 25. So, for all of you out there with a special friend who loves home theater, here is what he or she wants for Christmas.

**The 5.1 Audio Toolkit** So what if my company produced it! I'd use it regardless. There's simply no other DVD that contains as many audio test signals. Everything you need is there. Narrowband pink noise for balancing channel levels? You got it. Single sine tone sweeps for finding rattles? Yep. Broadband pink noise for verifying frequency response? Got that, too, along with signals to test timbre matching, imaging, reverb time, sound isolation, polarity, electrical signal level, noise floor, and headroom.

**Digital Video Essentials DVD or D-VHS** DVE is to video what the 5.1 Audio Toolkit is to audio. Put together by Mr. Video himself, Joe Kane, DVE provides every test signal you need to tweak a video display to your heart's content. Spouses, family

members, and special friends beware: This gift may become your home theater buff's favorite thing to watch. It's not hazardous to his or her health, but it may create domestic strife. Test signals are not regarded as entertainment by normal humans!

**Avia DVD** The Avia test DVD is a bit of a combination of the two discs above. It includes audio and video calibration test signals, along with some pretty handy tutorial functions. For those who deserve the best, there is also the Avia Pro suite of 6 DVDs complete with instruction manual. It's worth its weight in gold!

**Gray Scale Comparison Monitor** You used to be able to buy actual optical comparators to verify the accuracy of gray scale settings on displays. These things aren't available any more, but here's a cool replacement. Sony makes a small professional monochrome 9" monitor that is actually set to D65. It is called the PVM96. Feed a gray scale test signal to it, compare it to what you see on the display you're calibrating, and baddabing baddaboom, you know if you're going in the right direction with your gray scale tweaks. These are a bit pricy for a stocking stuffer, but I have seen them on the used market for really cheap!

**Etymotic Earphones** Research-grade reference audio transducers from Etymotic always come in handy. They're like ear buds, except they're really nice, fancy ear buds. There is simply no more accurate headphone or earphone available in the world. The medical profession uses them, and they're in the business of saving lives. More importantly, Etymotic earphones can be used for work as well as entertainment. In the field, you can hook them up to a pink noise generator and compare the pink noise through them to pink noise played through a sound system. The Etymotics are absolutely accurate, so anything that sounds different in the sound system means something somewhere needs to be fixed. Check out the ER-4 and ER-6.

**Etymotic ER-20 Earplugs** Etymotic strikes again with the coolest earplugs ever invented. Earplugs might not be the most likely gift, but they're certainly one of the most thoughtful – and useful. ER-20s reduce the volume, but don't change the frequency response of incoming sounds. Normal earplugs block almost all midrange, but have little or no effect at low frequencies. Not ER-20s. They are great for home theater buffs who are also musicians, or like to go to live concerts and want to preserve their hearing. Sound mixers have even been known to wear ER-20s while mixing live sound!

**Laser Level** I feel pretty safe in saying that everyone's least favorite part of installation is making things level. If that weren't the case, there wouldn't be an interactive kiosk at Home Depot dedicated to nifty leveling devices that employ lasers. It's impossible to

imagine, let alone list, all the possibilities, so just go to the store and enjoy playing with the pretty lights. Just remember not to shine them at anyone!

**Cable Tester** Your home theater buff probably already has one of these, but if not, get one immediately. In fact, you might not want to wait for Christmas morning. He or she probably needs it today!

**Gold Line TS-3 Rattler** Test gear maven Gold Line couldn't cook up a better stocking-stuffer if they tried. Small, affordable, and infinitely useful, this little gizmo generates a sweep-able sine wave that is perfect for identifying rattles in a home theater or media room. Hook it up to the sound system, and turn the knob. Happy hunting!

**Jensen Transformers ISO-KIT** The only thing on the I-hate-this-job list that possibly rivals making things level is troubleshooting hum and buzz in audio and video systems. Well, that job just got a whole lot easier. The ISO-KIT contains the most common A/V isolators, tester plugs, and a handy manual with detailed technical information about grounding and instructions for finding hum loops, buzz, etc. It's invaluable.

**Walkie-Talkies** Despite Nextel's best efforts, mobile phones are no substitute for good old-fashioned radios. Need to see what happens in Room B when you connect the wire in Room A? Use a radio. It saves time and legs. Best of all, you don't have to be inside a network – or wonder whether you paid your last phone bill!

Nothing says, "You're special!" like a thoughtful gift during the holidays. It is a tangible expression to someone of how much he or she means to you – you took the time to find something that is really useful. That's what makes Christmas more challenging than Thanksgiving or Halloween. It's our chance to do something for someone else.

This article is based on a column published by A. Grimani in Residential Systems magazine December 2005. Chase Walton contributed to this article.