

A Defining Moment

MEDIATECH DEVELOPS A SIGNATURE SYSTEM IN CHICAGO

by *Don Kreski*

“I want you to do this project. I don’t trust anyone else to do it right.”

There are times in a person’s career where everything seems to fall into place.

That was the case for MediaTech partners Dan Daker, Paul Faber, and Tom Young when a former client asked for their help. The year was 2004 and the three had been friends and colleagues for many years, working together at another custom home integrator.

“We had seen a number of growing problems at that company,” Faber explained, “while at the same time we felt there was an opportunity to take our skills and apply them in different ways.”

They founded MediaTech in 2003, but for its first year it was a very different company than it is today, focused on installing standardized structured wiring systems in new production homes.

“We were very successful with that business model, but we were regularly getting calls from our old customers asking for help with new systems and with upgrades,” Faber recalled. “We kept saying no, but finally this one former client insisted, and we agreed to do the job.”

The project was a condominium on the near north side of Chicago that the partners automated with an AMX system controlling audio, video, lighting, shading, security, heating and air conditioning.

“We realized this was the work we did best, so we began moving the company to custom home integration,” Faber said.

Unique Skills

Looking back, it should have been obvious that the partners’ backgrounds and temperaments were best suited for custom work. The company they left was a boutique residential integrator that worked only in very high-end homes, many belonging to celebrities.

“We traveled constantly,” Daker said, “since there were few who could afford these systems and they were located all over the country.” Much of their success was based on a proprietary home



DON KRESKI FOR AMX



Images of the project completed in 2004 that brought the partners back into the custom integration business.



DON KRESKI FOR AMX



DON KRESKI FOR AMX



Introducing the world's first adjustable-width Soundbars



Now shipping

- 3-way drivers for best-in-class sonic performance
- Eliminates long lead times associated with custom manufacturing
- Two models perfectly match any display 50" to 80"
- Shipped with all mounting hardware for VESA, key hole wall mount, and table-top

integration system the firm had invented in the early 1990s, one of the first in the world to control all of the electronic systems in a home.

Each partner had a specialty they would put to advantage at MediaTech. Daker was the VP of operations at the previous company and now handles finance, operations, and manages projects. Young is an engineer, programmer, and project manager, and Faber specializes in sales and system design. Yet even in moving MediaTech into custom integration, they took a different approach than the old firm, using their skills to customize automation systems from AMX, Control4, and Savant, rather than trying to build their own. In this way, they were able to offer almost any discerning homeowner a level of automation once available only to the super rich.

To create their signature systems, a MediaTech representative will begin by sitting down with the homeowner and his or her family, working closely with them to understand their needs, desires, and budget. He takes their ideas back to a MediaTech engineer, who creates a preliminary system design that will go back to the family to talk through and adjust.

The final system may be as simple as a one-room entertainment area or it may fully automate the home and include a home theater with acoustical treatments, whole-house audio and video, and custom lighting. MediaTech designs and installs home media, home networks, home automation systems, motorized window treatments, and lighting control, climate control, security, and telephone systems.

"The technology has advanced so much in the last few years that, very often, our clients are surprised how much their system will do for the price we talked about," Young added. The goal is always to fit the new system to the owners' lifestyle,



The MediaTech team, which is led by partners Paul Faber (on the far left), Dan Daker (fourth from the left), and Tom Young (far right).

simplifying their use of technology while enhancing the enjoyment of their home.

Unique Service

Of course a residential system, used constantly in the evening and on weekends, requires an "always on" service approach. MediaTech has a technician on call, ready to go out to a client at any time of the day or night.

"Generally, in larger companies these technicians are on an island—the problem is theirs and theirs alone to solve," Young explained. "Here, our people know they can always call another technician or one of us for consultation, and that's very helpful, since we each have our own areas of expertise. We often have three or four people working in the background on a given service call, and it's rare that it takes us more than one trip to solve a problem."

This in-depth approach would not be practical if the staff did not make every effort to keep service calls to a minimum. For example, the company has a fabrication area in its office in St. Charles, IL, where it pre-builds and tests clients' systems before they are installed in their homes.

"We brought in a new HDMI matrix switcher the

other day, and it turned out it had a bug in the firmware," Daker said. "We spent the whole day troubleshooting it with the manufacturer, but the homeowner was not affected in any way."

In addition, MediaTech offers remote monitoring of the control systems in clients' homes. "Very often, the system will generate a fault before it causes any discernible problem," Daker noted. "We will call to arrange service before the homeowner is aware of the issue."

The partners treat their employees well, and as a consequence turnover is very low. "Nearly all of our field technicians have five years of experience or more, and that helps us to keep quality levels high," Daker said. "I tell our customers we care about their systems almost more than they do, and we do. They call us about something they see as an inconvenience, but we believe any unsolved problem is a challenge to our reputation and our livelihood."

Maybe it's the years Faber, Daker, and Young spent working in celebrity homes. They simply will not accept the idea that "getting by" is good enough.

Don Kreski operates Kreski Marketing Consultants Inc. in Mt. Prospect, IL.



Projects completed more recently by MediaTech in west suburban Chicago.