

# WIRED

what's hot in technology



## TAMING CRITICAL TECHNICAL MASS

I have just moved into a new custom-built home smack dab in the middle of – no offense to the town council – nowhere, otherwise known as Indian Trail. Question: How does the editor of a rather civilized cultural magazine end up in a place not yet serviced by Time Warner Cable, BellSouth or even – Alltel? Answer: a simple obsession with horses my nine-year-old daughter, Madeline and I began pursuing a few years back.

So what does this seemingly divergent topic of rural living have to do with the article's title you ask? A good bit, in fact. You see, I have already amassed a rather complicated set of technical circumstances by launching a largely telecommuting business, running it from home four out of the past five years. I have a staff of 13 who communicate via phone and email, six personal computers and laptops, five various phone and fax numbers, six televisions with the requisite four Direct TV boxes (remember no Time Warner out here) and (shudder) 12 remotes, a PDA for which I can't find the charger, a surround sound system and three iPods, two of which are 'frozen' right now. I could go on if you want me to

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include digital cameras, a list of email addresses that I have to go to different sites to check, yada yada yada... But the main point is I have reached critical technical mass. Even if you are in half such a state, you have too.

We have this really great client at *Charlotte Taste*, whom we have put on alert several times in moments of crisis. They have provided me with a response time faster than you get from the folks at 911 (yes that's a testimonial) and boast an expansive repertoire of services well beyond my needs (or at least means). They are the big technical kahunas in Charlotte, providing service to clients ranging from prominent auto dealer families (whose names I shall leave out to protect the innocent) all the way to people like little old Mini Me who have experienced exponential business growth and need to streamline existing technology tools to simplify and improve processes.

We decided to launch our new technology column, *Wired*, focusing on a company you should talk to FIRST before you entertain thoughts of buying anything new, so you can seamlessly integrate what you have with what you want. Charlotte Tech Support handles a full range of services from turnkey home theater, a/v systems and computer networking, to technology consulting for building, remodeling, moving and small business IT systems.

I gave co-owner Clayton Blount a proactive call for a change, and enlisted his and his partner Tony's help solving the following technical difficulties:

- Get me down to a 1:1 ratio of remotes to televisions that are user intuitive for women and children (dare I start with an unachievable goal?), where my daughter can actually find Nickelodeon to watch *Full House* and *Sponge Bob*.
- Fine tune our surround sound system and hang speakers for optimum performance, hiding the hideous volume of wires that could easily stretch across Mecklenburg (or at least Union) County.
- Help me figure out how to phase out a Road Runner email address I have had for five years of business in a public/communications industry so I don't lose contact with thousands of international companies.
- Consolidate email and phone accounts to a Blackberry-type PDA.
- Make my wireless system work so my son is not constantly sitting on my bedroom floor with his laptop (and candy wrappers) next to the router so he can get a signal.
- Put a filter on my home computers to protect aforementioned child and his kid sister from inappropriate websites.
- Find a wireless card that works for G3 Mac and set up email access so design and intern staff can access company FTP site.
- Create an automatic backup system for both home and work.
- Review virus, spam and spy ware software to see why junk is still infiltrating my system. Put a stop to it as much as possible. Scan and clean all computer systems for maximum efficiency.
- Reconfigure Outlook for optimum efficiency and customize to

suit personal and business needs.

- Assist in creating a shared Outlook calendar for team members.
- Recommend and setup a wireless printer at home with digital photo capabilities.
- Troubleshoot iPods and allow for music sharing between family members.
- Make any recommendations for optimum efficiency and simplification based on current equipment and how it fits with needs and business growth.
- Get on a regular preventative maintenance plan to keep all fixes and upgrades current.

Here's how it went in a nutshell, and why these guys are so different...

"We started this company believing in the philosophy of 'keep it simple stupid', completely understanding the full spectrum of technology so we can integrate it in a way that's most efficient and productive for your specific needs," says Clayton, the marketing and sales arm of the dynamic duo operation. "We channel our services to help people where, when and how they need it."

The first thing they tell me, is, "We can do all of this for you and it's really pretty simple stuff." Ok, now I am not sure when you last worked with a techie, but I did last week. No offense to my friends over at IBM, but generally conversations with right-brained to left-brained folk go something like, "Blah blah blah... techno jargon... blah blah blah... we could do it this way... blah blah blah... or that way..."... await reply – long blank stare.

"I don't really care, just get it done, and I don't really care how much it costs if you can make it work right." Oh, oops, did I say that?

Tony, the left-brained wizard, gets right in and rolls up his sleeves. "Here's what we'll do. We'll get you one remote for each TV center. It's as simple as pie". I take note that tech guy speaks same language as sales guy. Go figure. "The remote is a color LCD thing that solves all your problems and handles your needs (Is he really a techie or the concierge at the Ritz?). The remote has a large database in it you can access literally with a help button that will guide you through a series of questions should you get stuck." At \$250 I am thinking this is about the same price as the two therapy sessions that keeping five remotes to watch one TV would necessitate. Sign me up.

"For your surround sound system, we'll hide all the wires, install the speakers correctly, calibrate the video and tweak the system, all centering on a sweet spot that will make a very noticeable difference – not just wiring but stuff that'll make your system perform optimally and you'll have the same sound and picture at home that you were sold on in the store. Some of these systems – a good bit in fact – are so sensitive they can even be calibrated to accommodate sound absorption from shag carpet and drapes," explains Tony the techie. Bring it on – let's rock and roll.

"For your email, simple, again," says Clayton the sales guy. I'm already sold. "We can switch on a setting that allows you to reroute your mail, similar to the regular postal mail, creating an auto reply



message to update mail recipients. You still receive email sent to your old address and they get the new address to update their address book," says Tony. I am thinking this guy's so real he may even buy into my theory that little green men inhabit computers instead of the alleged chip. I toss it out there with Quantum Physics string theory and am acknowledged. I am beginning to wonder why I didn't call these guys back when they really wanted to rescue me and I... quote, unquote 'solved my own problem'. I'm beginning to see these guys really want to help and know their stuff backwards and forwards. What was I thinking?

"Hey, we don't just do this for a living. I'm a freak," says Tony. "I've been doing this since I was a kid. I've seen white papers on product developments, all kinds of ground floor stuff. I do it as a passion and a hobby." Tony's not kidding either.

"Your router's a piece of cake too. You don't need a new one - we'll just add another access point for your router to strengthen the signal, maybe get a new card for your son's since his laptop is five years old. And by the way, in dog years it's time to retire." Ok, don't push too hard guys, a 12-year-old man boy does not need a state-of-the-art laptop, although he personally justifies to mom it will help him keep his straight A's up and get into Harvard.

"And your cordless phone may have something to do with the problem. Cordless phones cause interference if you are at the 2.4

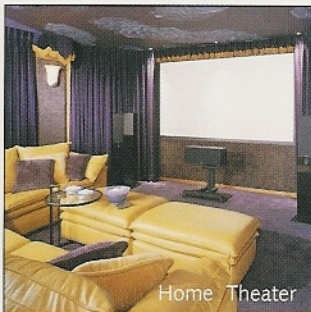
spectrum. All you need to do is run at 5.8 and you won't have interference."

"For the internet filters, we can purchase a program for about \$45 a year that not only blocks children from going to inappropriate sites, it automatically updates when new sites emerge," says Tony. Sign me up. "We'll get your G3 hooked up to your wireless network so you can use email and other equipment.

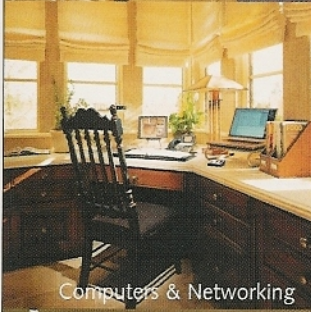
Tony and Clayton effortlessly breeze through the list of other 'issues', including setup of a shared hard drive that recognizes each of our individual iPods and responds accordingly. They also listened to my high level business processes, recommended adjustments and scheduled regular preventative maintenance plans that keep all fixes and upgrades current.

These guys know their stuff. So if you've got any technical issues of your own, are thinking about buying a surround sound and want it to sound like a live performance at The Lincoln Center, are in the process of creating your own home theater, or just want your home theater and business to run bug-free, give Tony and Clayton a call. ■

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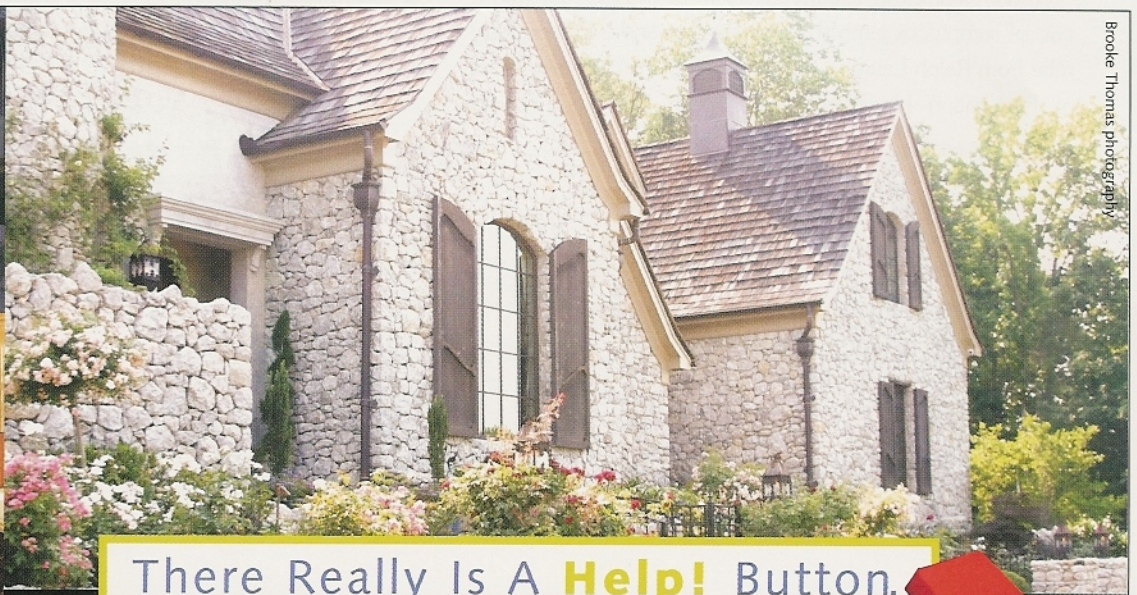
Home Theater



Computers & Networking



Audio & Video Systems



Brooke Thomas photography

## There Really Is A **Help!** Button.



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**Help** You Purchase It At The Right Price.

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