

900 North Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois

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Crestron Delivers Superior Home Automation Options to Boost Luxury Condo Sales

It's no secret that competition is tough for condominium developers these days. However, if someone provides a truly superior product, people will buy.

Chicago-based Development Management Associates (DMA), a third party developer of residential, office, retail, and mixed-use properties, recently developed 47 luxury condominiums at 900 North Michigan Avenue, on Chicago's "Magnificent Mile." DMA converted floors 21 - 28 from office space into two- and three-bedroom residences that sell for \$2.5 to \$5 million.



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“There's always a debate about how much to put into a project like this. We knew we wanted a very nice base package, and we had to give owners a lot of upgrade choices, but we also wanted something that would set it apart from other developments of this kind.” says Jaimie Bulla, Development Manager for DMA.



“When we were brought into the project about four years ago, DMA was looking for a point of differentiation,” explains George Velazquez, a principal at Chicago-based AV integrator, Integrisys. “They saw AV technology as a necessity, but wanted to give buyers the opportunity to pick and choose what they wanted, and they hoped to offer something that other developers did not.”

“Because of our extensive experience with these building types,” Bulla continues, “we recognized the value of high end audio, video and related systems, and the need for a backbone that could offer more to this type of buyer.”

Velazquez originally considered offering DMA what's probably the leading residential amenities system. He soon realized this system was not as flexible as the developers hoped and required a much larger investment than they anticipated. Plus, it would have required each homeowner to purchase specialized equipment, and the property owner to purchase and maintain its own servers.

“We had our own system, IntelliPlex®, in beta testing at that time, and it seemed to be a much better fit for this project.” IntelliPlex is browser-based, which means it can run on any web-capable device and be hosted by Integrisys' own web servers. That meant



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that DMA could build it into their base package without any significant increase in cost, and allow homeowners to access it from whatever type of device they were most comfortable with. "For us, there were two major advantages that IntelliPlex offered," Bulla says. "First, it gave homeowners fast, foolproof communications with building staff, without the need to pick up the phone. They could ask the valet to bring their cars up from the garage or send a note to the doorman to have a taxi ready. It also connected them to the restaurants, theaters and other offerings of the neighborhood, all from a single interface."

Though the IntelliPlex system can be accessed from a computer or a web-enabled cell phone, not all homeowners are inclined to do so, according to Bulla. Roughly half access the system from a Crestron TPMC-8X wireless panel, and they appreciate being able to do so from wherever they are in the home.

The Crestron control system and TPMC-8X touchpanels have Windows XP embedded, which was crucial to the success of this project since IntelliPlex allows the property manager to update their amenities offerings from a browser-based management package. "We would not have been able to do that with any other control system," Velazquez notes. "With another system, whenever they wanted to make a change we would have to update each touchpanel individually. But here, all changes are immediately reflected on each Crestron touchscreen."

Also important to DMA's offerings was the ability to choose various audio and video options. Integrisys offered homeowners the choice of three different packages in each of six categories: distributed audio, distributed video, home theater or TV, lighting control, phone system communications, and automated window treatments. "Nearly all the buyers wanted some form of whole house audio," says Bulla. "And those with children often wanted whole house video as well, meaning, the ability to play anything they wanted at any time, in any room."

Integrisys was also tasked with providing infrastructure for each of the 47 units, including a central AV enclosure and all network, telephone and AV cabling. "We put standard structured cabling in each unit," Velazquez explains, "and we pre-designed the cabling system based on the floor plans before the units were sold, to insure flexibility in the future. For example, every bedroom has two drops."

To deliver a scalable, versatile infrastructure, Crestron QuickMedia transport technology was a natural choice. "Our goal is always minimizing the amount of wiring by utilizing cable that can be used in different ways, so we usually use category cabling all the way through. There are times when we might run RGB or HDMI cables, but an HDMI is always an HDMI and if something should change in the future, we wouldn't be able to update," Velazquez says.

At 900 North, a systems consultant from Integrisys would meet with new homeowners to plan their AV system. Crestron Adagio was selected for nearly all audio systems and Crestron PVID components in most of the video systems as well.



Sometimes a homeowner has or prefers another media server, but we prefer using Crestron equipment wherever we can," he explains. "Adagio works really well for us. We can combine audio distribution and control with one reliable device, and it offers more than enough audio zones for most condos. As a single system, it takes up less real estate, and there's less likelihood of failure."

Integrisys offered homeowners two wireless control units with its packages: the Crestron ML-600 handheld remote and the TPMC-8X eight-inch wireless touchpanel. Homeowners could also choose, or add, Crestron APAD wall-mount controllers. Velazquez says all three choices work well with the audio, video, lighting and blinds/shade control. A TPMC-8X is required for those wanting a touchscreen interface to IntelliPlex or IntegriNet™, a web-based interface that allows homeowners to request services, and check status and history of those services.

Bulla was ecstatic with the installed systems and with the AV integrator. "Integrisys was fantastic through the entire pre-sales and installation processes. They were very client-orientated and were able to service each homeowner personally." "The Crestron systems allowed a lot of flexibility," he adds. "Every buyer is different. Some people didn't want to purchase a complete package. They wanted a bit of this and a bit of that. And Integrisys easily maneuvered through that, from our standpoint. There were very few issues, and with a project this size, that's saying something."

As a result, the building continues to be successful. "Two more units were sold last month," Bulla says. "That brings them to about 75% occupancy, which in this market is very good."