



And the winner is...

NOW THE MOST COVETED AWARD IN THE CUSTOM INSTALLATION INDUSTRY, THE WINNERS OF THE 2014 **CONNECTED HOME 50 MOST POPULAR AWARDS** HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED. **PAUL SKELTON** REPORTS.

When we started the *Connected Home* 50 Most Popular Awards in 2012, we were really quite chuffed that just over 250 installers voted for the brands they wanted to recognise as the industry's best and brightest.

The initial idea behind holding these awards was to find those brands that dealers believed went above and beyond the competition. This data had never before been collected in Australia, which made it difficult to track exactly what the Australian home automation landscape looked like.

In 2013, the number of voters grew to 477. This of course made the categories more competitive, and more indicative of what was really happening in the market. Further, news around the awards was appearing around the world - international suppliers were tracking the results and were actively promoting their successes. The awards had gone global.

In 2014, 857 members of the custom installation channel voted for their favourite brands across 50 categories, which for the first time included commercial categories as well as residential.

So, what have we learned over the past three years?

First, apparently Sonance is an unstoppable force. Since 2012, the company has been voted as the most popular in-wall/in-ceiling speakers and the most popular outdoor loudspeakers. For the past two years, it has also been named the most popular 'invisible' loudspeakers.

Second, custom integrators aren't afraid to vote for 'egg cartons' as their most popular acoustic treatment, but once again Primacoustics reigns supreme.

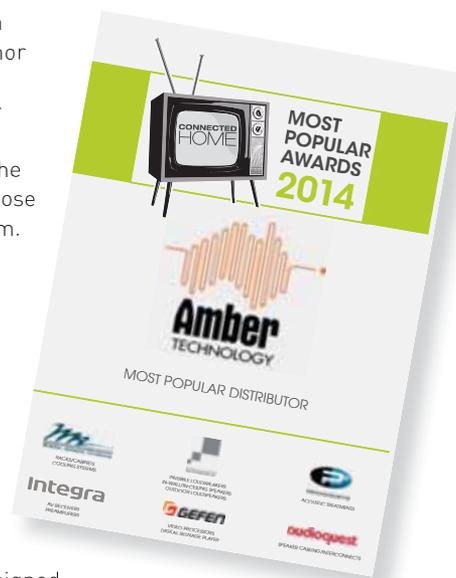
Third, integrators like to support local suppliers,

such as Kordz, Screen Technics, Ness and Thor Technologies, all of which dominated their respective categories.

Finally, the guys on the tools want to reward those suppliers that help them.

It's important for me to remind those companies that didn't win, these awards are purely a popularity contest. We're not saying that the winners have the best product on the market, or the newest. These awards are simply designed to let suppliers know what integrators think of their brands. Yes, this could be based on product, but it could also include service, support, reputation, incentive schemes and even your local distribution.

Already things are happening in the industry that are set to make the 2015 awards very interesting. New brands, new distribution agreements and new products that are set to massive will all affect the results next year. What are you doing? **CH**



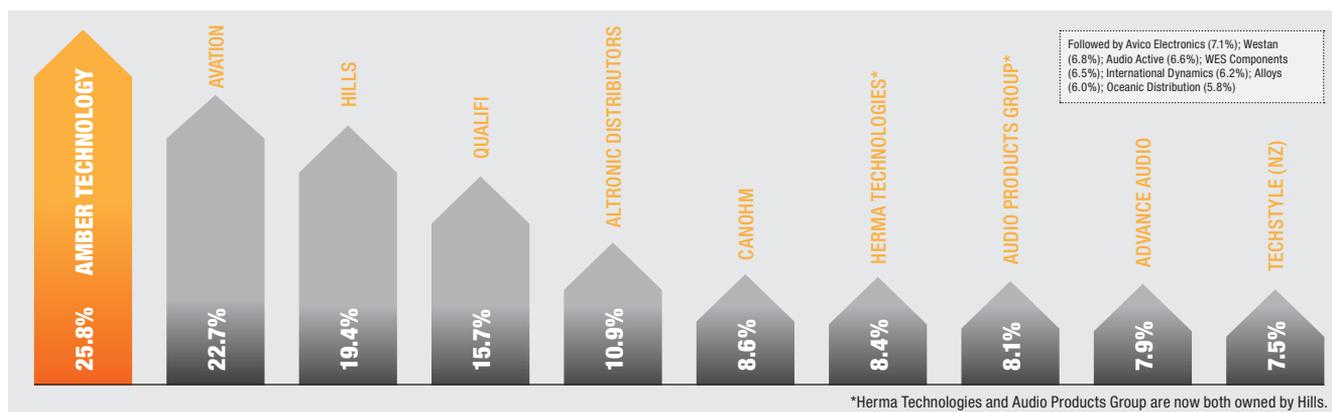
The 2014 *Connected Home* Most Popular Awards were presented to winners exhibiting at this year's Integrate Expo in Homebush, including Amber Technology, resi-linx, Somfy, Clipsal by Schneider Electric and Avation.



CATEGORY	WINNER	DISTRIBUTOR
ACOUSTIC TREATMENTS	Primacoustics	Amber Technology
ANTENNAS	Hills A&TV	Hills
AV RECEIVERS	Integra	Amber Technology
BLU-RAY PLAYERS	Oppo	International Dynamics
COOLING SYSTEMS	Middle Atlantic	Amber Technology
DACS	Marantz	QualiFi
DIGITAL SIGNAGE CMS	Scala	TechMedia
DIGITAL SIGNAGE DISPLAYS	Samsung	
DIGITAL SIGNAGE PLAYER	Gefen	Amber Technology
ELECTRICAL ACCESSORIES	Clipsal	
ENERGY MONITORING	Environexus	
FLAT PANEL DISPLAYS	Samsung	
FREESTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS	Jamo	QualiFi
HDMI CABLING	Kordz	
HOME THEATRE PROJECTORS	Epson	
INTERCOM	Aiphone	APG
INVISIBLE LOUDSPEAKERS	Sonance	Amber Technology
IN-WALL/IN-CEILING SPEAKERS	Sonance	Amber Technology
IP SECURITY CAMERAS	Ness	
IR EXTENDER/DISTRIBUTOR	resi-linx	Vcomm
LED LIGHTING	Philips	
LIFTERS	Ultralift	
LIGHTING CONTROL	Clipsal	
MATRIX SWITCHERS	Zigen	Avation
MEDIA SERVERS	Apple TV	Apple
MEDIA STREAMING DEVICE	Apple TV	Apple

CATEGORY	WINNER	DISTRIBUTOR
MICROPHONES	Sennheiser	
MOTORISED BLINDS	Somfy	
MULTI-ROOM AV DISTRIBUTION	Sonos	
OUTDOOR DISPLAYS	Sunbrite	Hills
OUTDOOR LOUDSPEAKERS	Sonance	Amber Technology
PREAMPLIFIERS	Integra	Amber Technology
PROJECTION SCREENS	Screen Technics	
RACKS/CABINETS	Middle Atlantic	Amber Technology
REMOTE CONTROL	RTI	Avation
ROUTERS	Netgear	
SEATING	LP Morgan	Hills
SECURITY SYSTEMS	Ness	
SHORT-THROW PROJECTORS	Epson	
SOUNDBARS	Sonos	
SPEAKER CABLING/ INTERCONNECTS	Audioquest	Amber Technology
SUBWOOFERS	Velodyne	Revolution Technologies
SURGE PROTECTION	Thor Technologies	
TACTILE SOUND TRANSDUCERS (SHAKERS)	D-Box	Wavetrain
TELEPHONY	Panasonic	
TV MOUNTS	Vogel's	Canohm
UPS	Thor Technologies	
VIDEO PROCESSORS	Gefen	Amber Technology
WHOLE-HOUSE CONTROL SYSTEM	RTI	Avation

2014 MOST POPULAR DISTRIBUTOR



For the second year in a row, Amber Technology has been voted by the readers of *Connected Home* as their most popular distributor. In addition to this title, the company also picked up 11 other category wins, increasing its haul from last year by one. Avation, Hills and QualiFi all retain their positions from last year, too. A special mention must go to TechStyle from NZ for making it into the top 10.



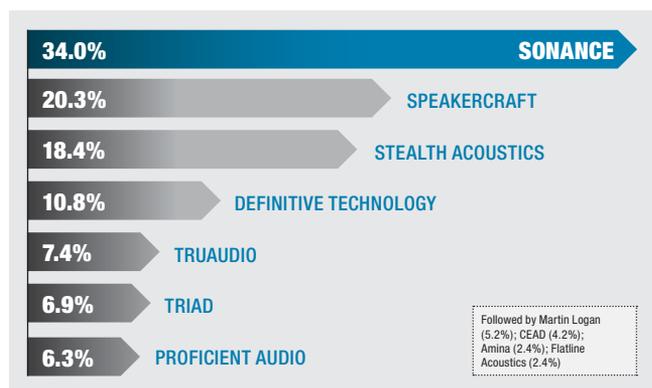


IN-WALL/IN-CEILING SPEAKERS



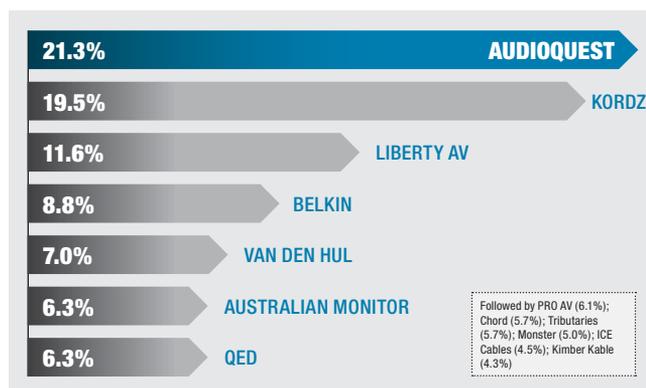
Proving that its domination in 2013 was no fluke, Sonance has once again won three categories, including most popular in-wall/in-ceiling speakers. This title comes in the wake of the successful launch of the company's Visual Performance (VP) series. A special mention goes to SpeakerCraft, which closed the gap significantly to put it in a strong position moving forward. Watch out for Origin Acoustics in 2015.

'INVISIBLE' LOUDSPEAKERS



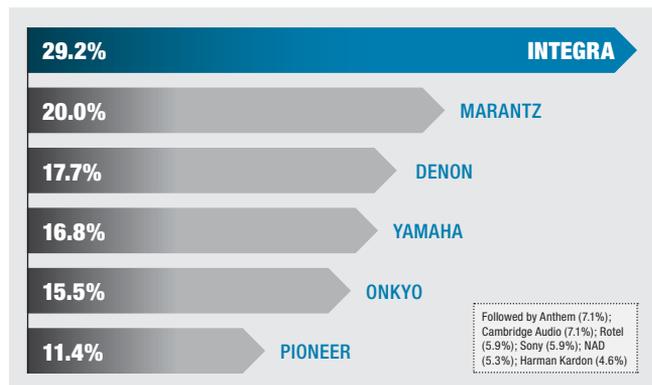
While Sonance has retained this title, too, the big mover here is SpeakerCraft, which didn't even rate a mention in the 2013 awards. It is now second, ahead of sector heavyweight Stealth Acoustics.

SPEAKER CABLING / INTERCONNECTS



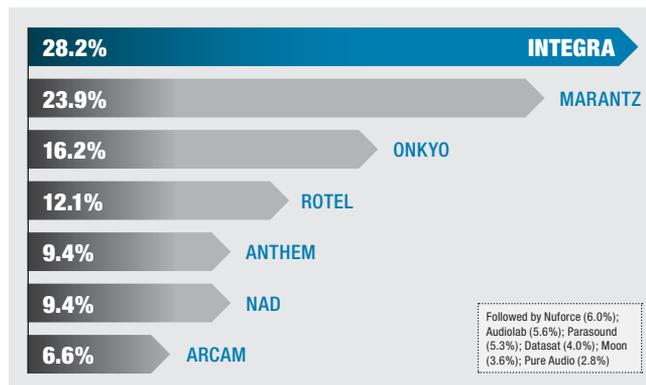
Audioquest has backed up its 2013 victory with another win in 2014, but impressively Kordz, Liberty AV, Van Den Hul, Australian Monitor and QED are all new entries to the top picks list this year.

AV RECEIVERS



Perhaps unsurprisingly, the top six in this category are the same as 2013. The change? Marantz and Yamaha have swapped places indicating very strong support for the D+M Group brands.

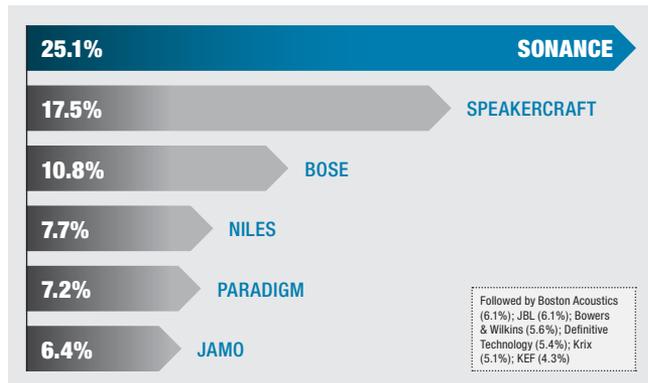
PREAMPLIFIERS



The preamplifier category of the 2014 awards is a mirror image of 2013. The improver here is Arcam, a traditional hi-fi brand that recently renewed its focus on the custom channel. It seems to have paid off.



OUTDOOR LOUDSPEAKERS



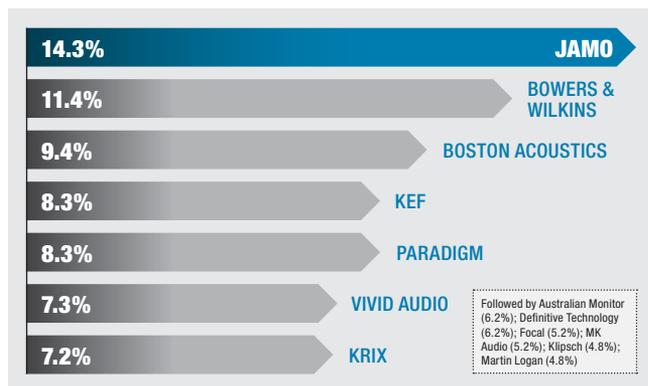
Congratulations again to Sonance for retaining this title, but once again it is SpeakerCraft that has made some inroads, moving into a strong second place. Bose's percentage halved in 2014.

SUBWOOFERS



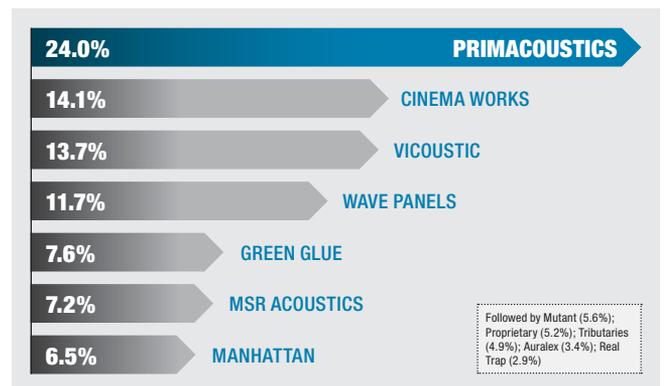
Velodyne is yet another back-to-back winner, having also won this category in 2013. The big change here is the introduction of Bowers & Wilkins to fourth place after not being mentioned last year.

FREESTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS



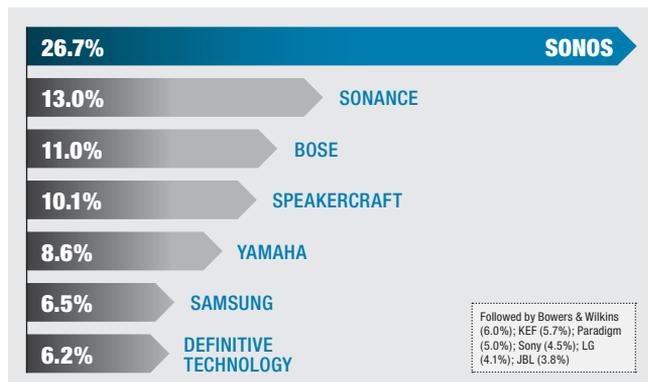
After a strange result in 2013, where Bose won this category despite not actually making freestanding loudspeakers, Jamo (2013's runner up) has taken the 2014 title. Boston and Vivid are new entries in 2014.

ACOUSTIC TREATMENTS



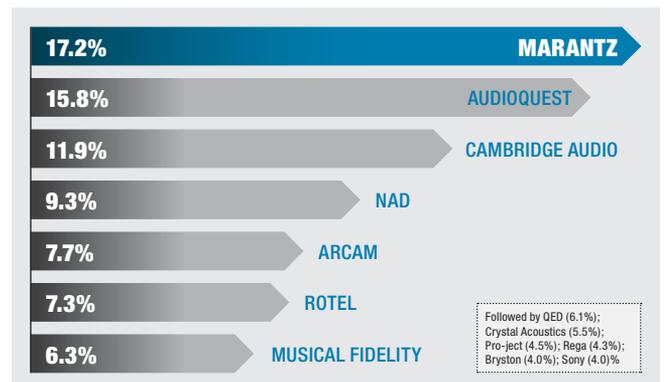
Primacoustics has increased its lead in this category and last year's runner up, Dynamat, has disappeared completely. Who would have thought there would be such drama in acoustic treatments?

SOUNDBARS



Few other categories in these awards could be seen as such a given. Sonos dominated in 2013 and again in 2014. Sonance is a new entry here, as is Definitive Technology.

DACS

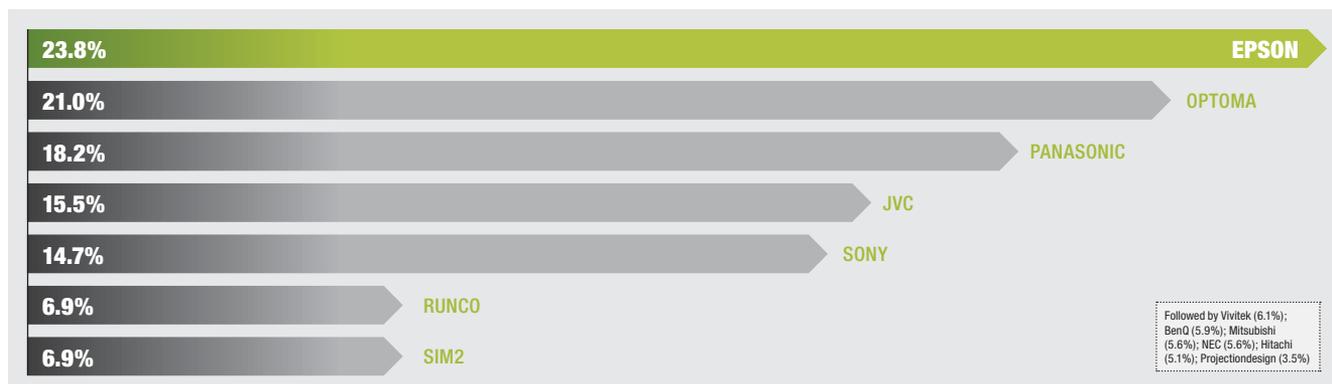


This is a new category for the 2014 awards and proved to be one of the more hotly contested. Congratulations go to Marantz for staving off some tough competition, particularly from Audioquest.



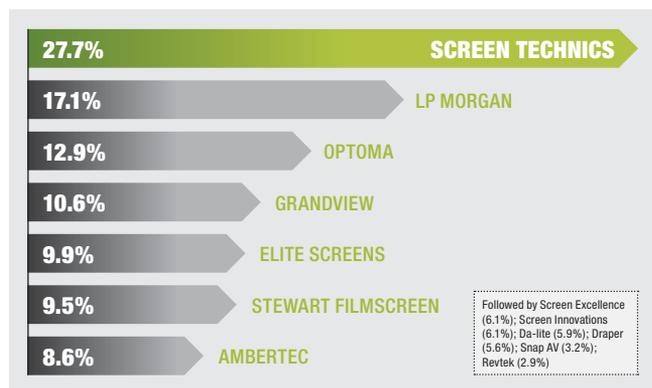


HOME THEATRE PROJECTORS



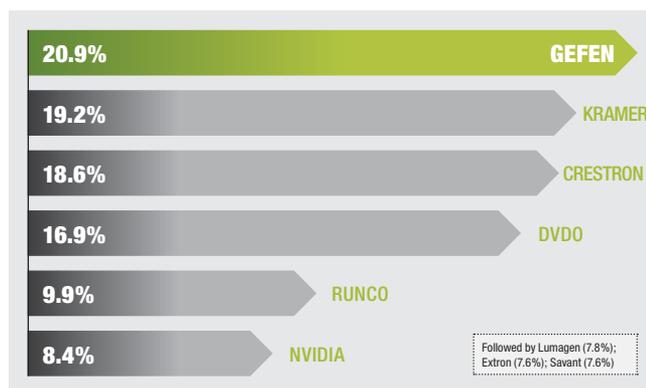
What happened, JVC? Last year's winner has fallen to fourth place while last year's bridesmaid, Epson, has taken the 2014 title. Optoma also increased on its popularity among readers, increasing from 17.5% last year to 21% in 2014. Also, Mitsubishi's exit from the market made room for Runco and Sim2 to both increase upon their 2013 standing.

PROJECTION SCREENS



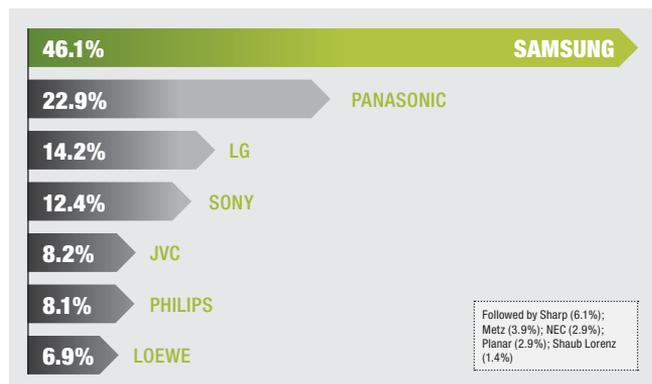
Proving that local manufacturing remains strong, Screen Technics has retained its clear dominance of this category. The big mover here again is Optoma, which didn't appear in the 2013 awards.

VIDEO PROCESSORS



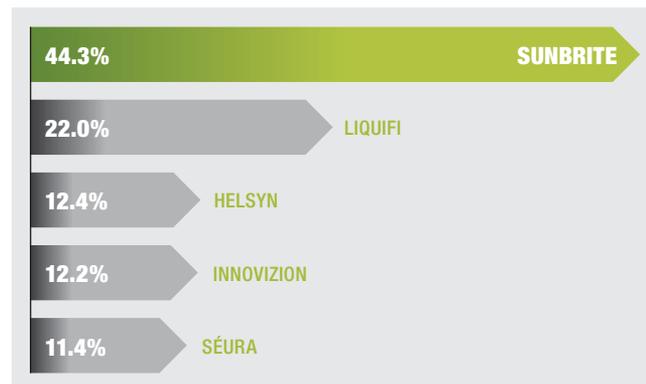
Last year's winner, Crestron, has slipped to third place here, with two new entries - Gefen and Kramer - topping the list. Congratulations to Gefen for winning a very tight competition.

FLAT PANEL DISPLAYS



The only aspect of this category that was at all undecided was how strong of a lead Samsung would have over the competition. Good work to LG for increasing from 4.4% last year to 14.2% here.

OUTDOOR DISPLAYS

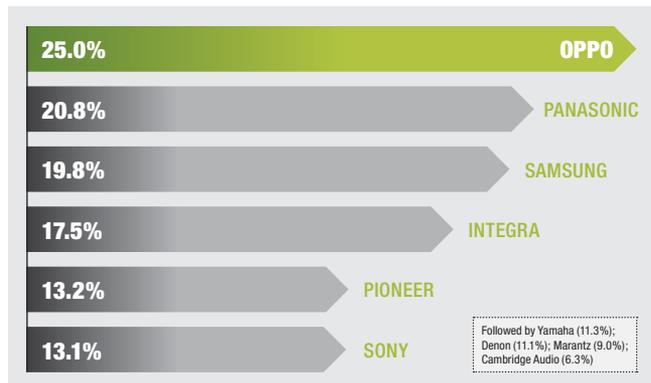


After a close call in 2013, in which Sunbrite narrowly beat out Sony, which doesn't play in this space, Sunbrite can finally show off how strong of a following it truly has in this market.



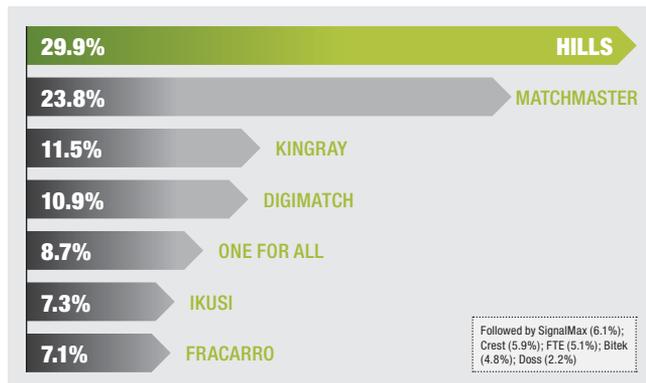


BLU-RAY PLAYERS



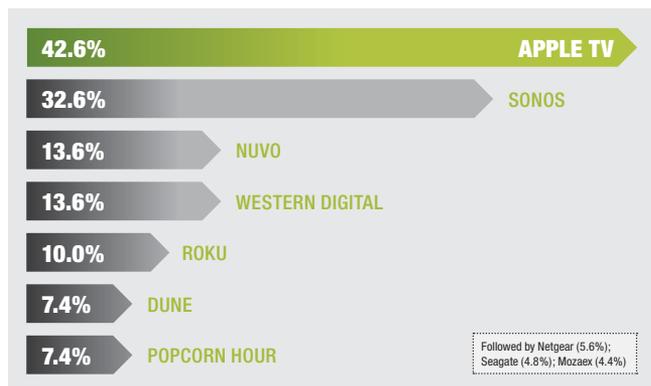
While there's been no change at the top, with Oppo winning this category once again, Panasonic made a very strong showing, increasing on last year. Denon, however, went the opposite direction.

ANTENNAS



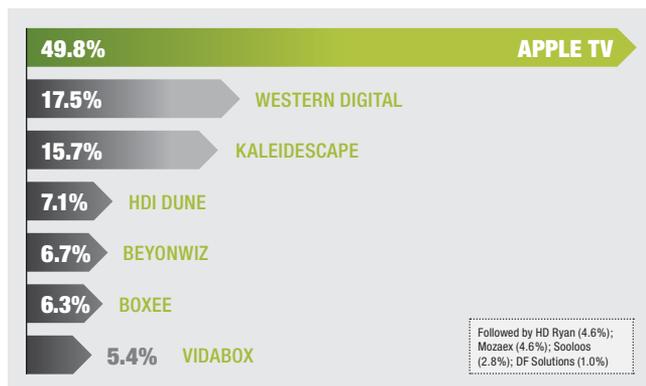
Hills and Matchmaster continue to lead this category, with Kingray remaining a not-too-distant third. One For All and Fracarro are the new entries here, not appearing in the 2013 results.

MEDIA STREAMING DEVICES



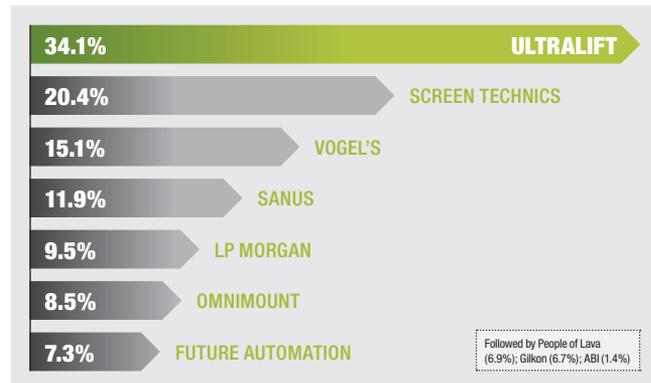
New in 2014, this category was really about who would come second as the winner was never in doubt. Congratulations, Sonos, for flying that close to the sun and not getting burned.

MEDIA SERVERS



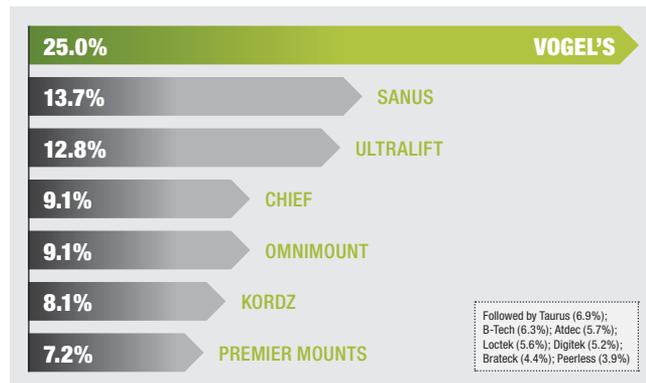
Apparently there is a company called Apple that make consumer electronics devices that have a very strong following. The surprise here is Western Digital, which has shot all the way up to second.

LIFTERS



Has there ever been a company more synonymous with a particular category? Ultralift is lifters. A special mention must go to Screen Technics, which didn't appear in 2013 and is now second.

TV MOUNTS

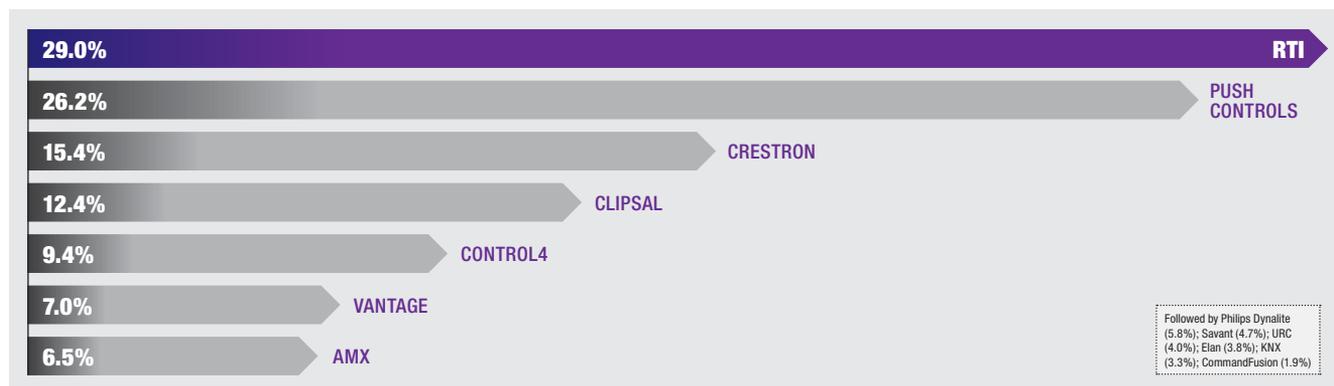


For the second year running, Vogel's has been named the most popular TV mounts in Australia. With so many to choose from, it's great to see some very strong manufacturers being recognised here.



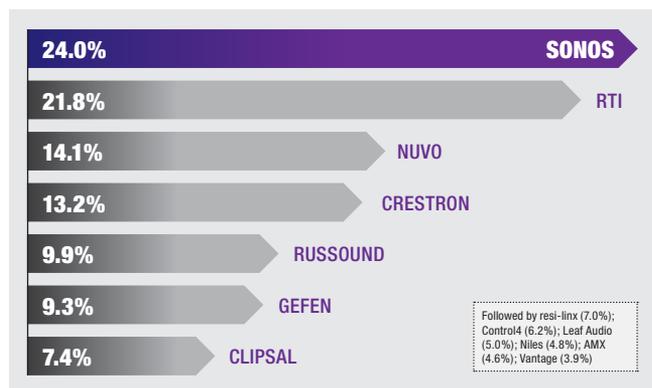


WHOLE-HOUSE CONTROL SYSTEM



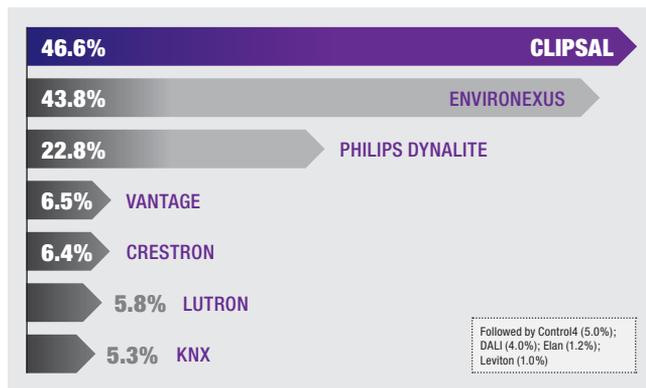
Showing the strength of its dealer base and distributor, RTI has once again won this category. This is no doubt on the back of a slew of new products entering the market, further extending the company's reach. Moving forward, Schneider Electric's acquisition of Push Controls, which retains second position, will be an interesting factor for the 2015 awards. Crestron showed good growth on 2013's result.

MULTI-ROOM AV DISTRIBUTION



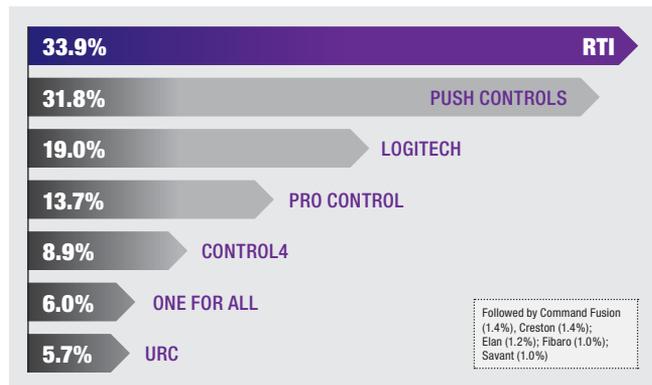
While Sonos again won this category, RTI closed the winning margin from 18.2% last year to 2.2% in 2014. This is particularly interesting given the different sectors of the market both brands service.

LIGHTING CONTROL



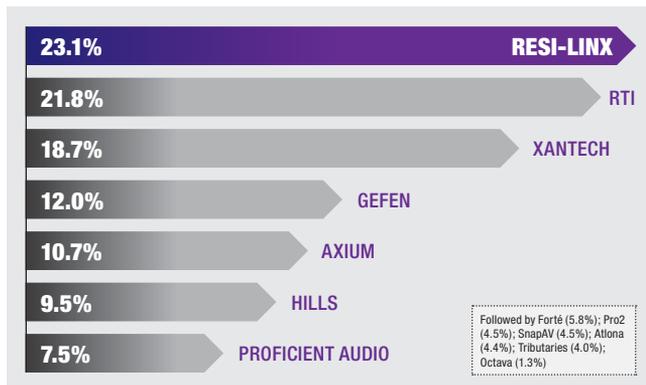
Almost out of nowhere, Environexus has shot to second place, vying with Clipsal for first place. This is an incredibly strong showing from the Melbourne-based start-up.

REMOTE CONTROL



Once again, RTI and Push Controls are one and two, respectively, with Logitech holding on to third place. Similar to the whole-house control system category, will Push Controls' acquisition change things in 2015?

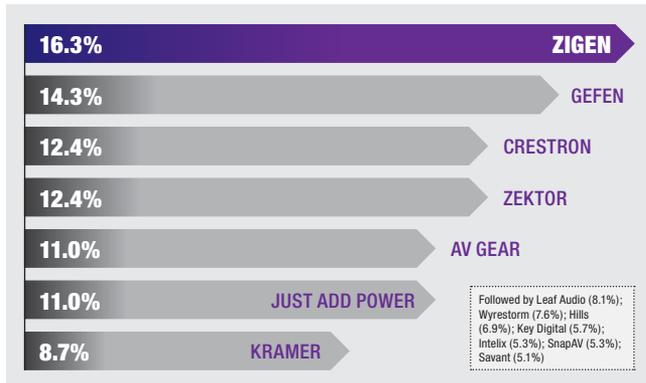
IR DISTRIBUTOR/EXTENDER



After a close second in 2013, local supplier resi-linx has taken out the award for most popular IR distributor/extender. Last year's winner, Xantech, has moved to third and RTI has entered at second.

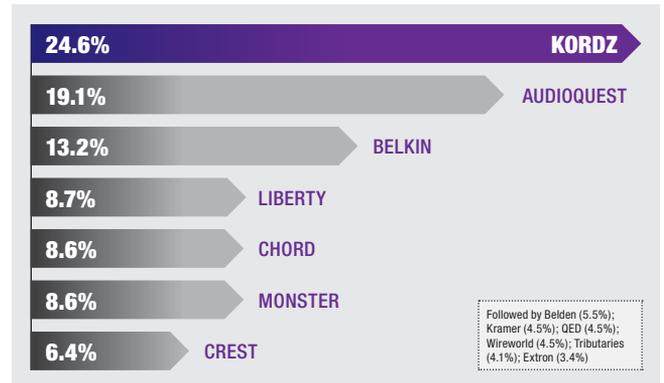


MATRIX SWITCHERS



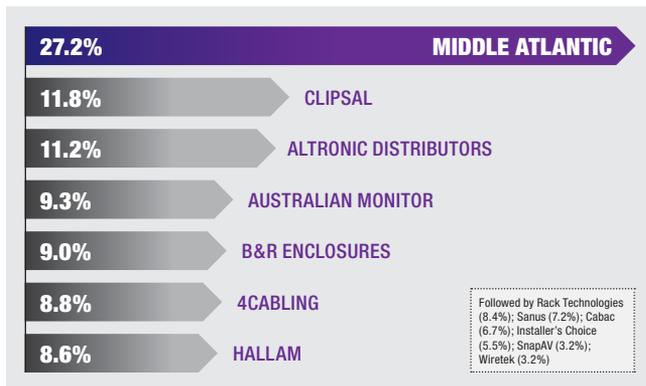
It's safe to say that Queensland-based Avation has matrix switchers sewn up in Australia. Three of the top five brands - Zigen, Zektor and AV Gear - all come through the Gold Coast distributor.

HDMI CABLING



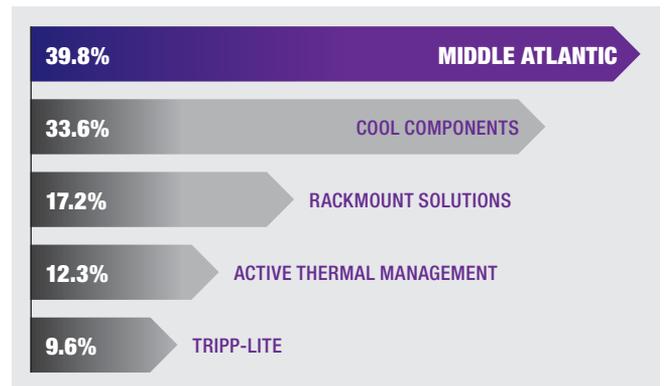
The top three placings in this category are repeats from 2013. Once again, Kordz has shown that local product reigns supreme and that people are willing to pay for quality.

RACKS/CABINETS



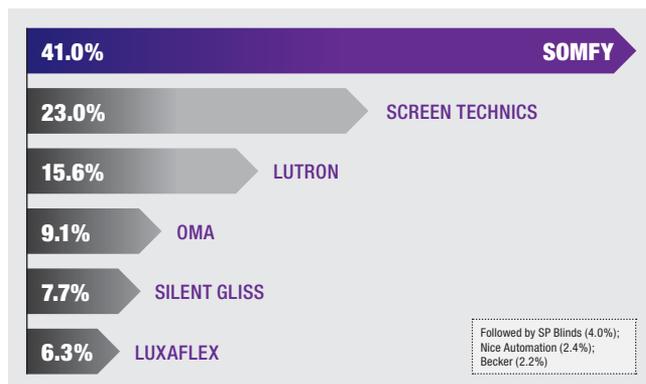
Yet again, Middle Atlantic has taken the title of most popular racks/cabinets. The exciting change here is the introduction of Altronics at number three. Aussie suppliers made a strong showing here.

COOLING SYSTEMS



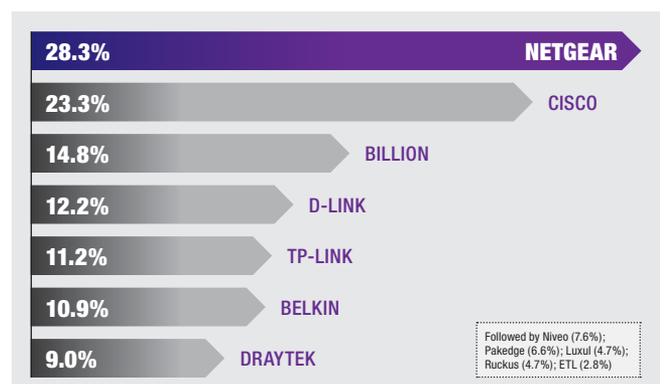
Knocking Cool Components off its perch in 2014, Middle Atlantic cements Amber Technology's place as king of cooling. Welcome to Rackmount Solutions and Tripp-lite, both new entries in 2014.

MOTORISED BLINDS



While Somfy once again dominated this category, and obviously so, it is Screen Technics that again came out of nowhere to reach second place, showing it does a lot more than just projection screens.

ROUTERS



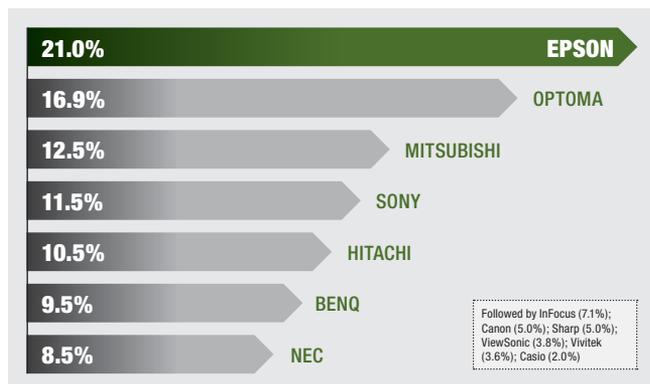
Netgear and Cisco have backed up their 2013 placings with another strong showing in 2014. Billion has crept up from fifth to third, and TP-Link enters the charts at number five.





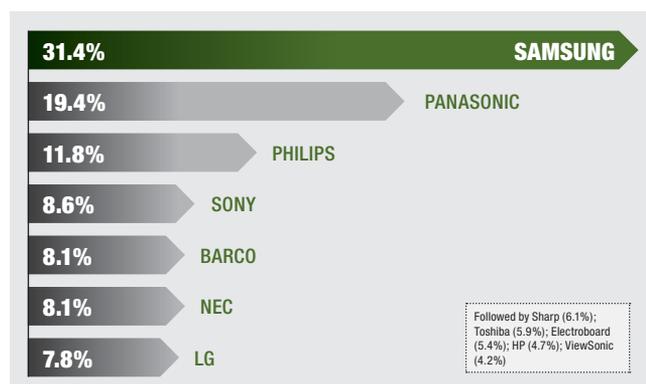
2014 COMMERCIAL

SHORT-THROW PROJECTORS



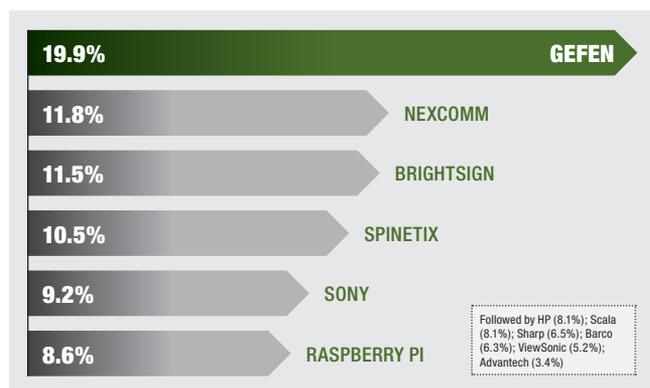
Backing up its win in the home theatre projector category, Epson has also been voted as the most popular short-throw projectors in Australia. Optoma has also performed well here.

DIGITAL SIGNAGE DISPLAYS



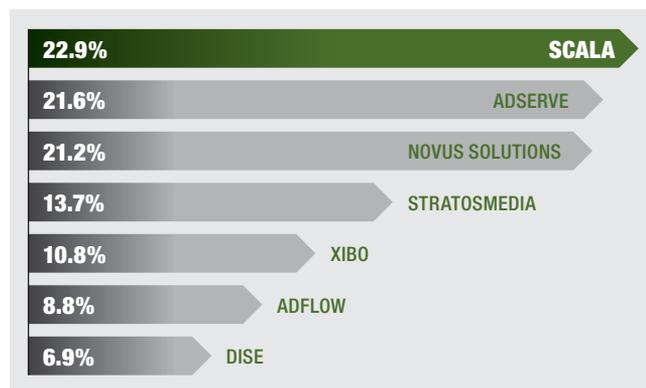
Not content with just one award, Samsung has also taken the title of most popular digital signage display. This category appears to be quite active, so 2015 is bound to see interesting changes.

DIGITAL SIGNAGE PLAYER



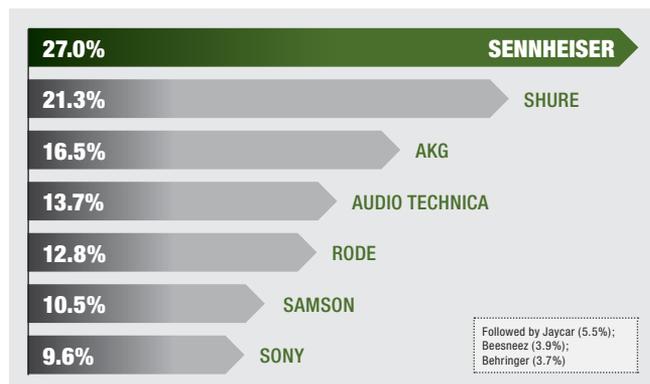
A new category in 2014, the award for most popular digital signage player has been given to Gefen. But, will Brightsign's new 4K solution have an impact on the 2015 awards?

DIGITAL SIGNAGE CMS



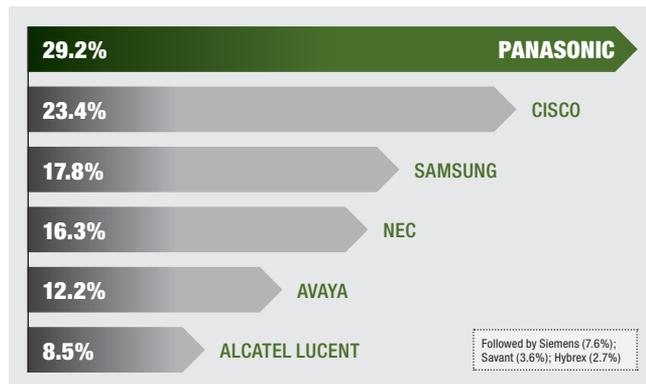
At the 2014 Integrate Expo, you couldn't escape digital signage CMS. And, according to the readers of *Connected Home*, Scala is the pick of the bunch, with Adserve and Novus close behind.

MICROPHONES



The recent changes to Sennheiser's distribution model in Australia appear to have paid off, with the company's being named the most popular microphones in 2014.

TELEPHONY

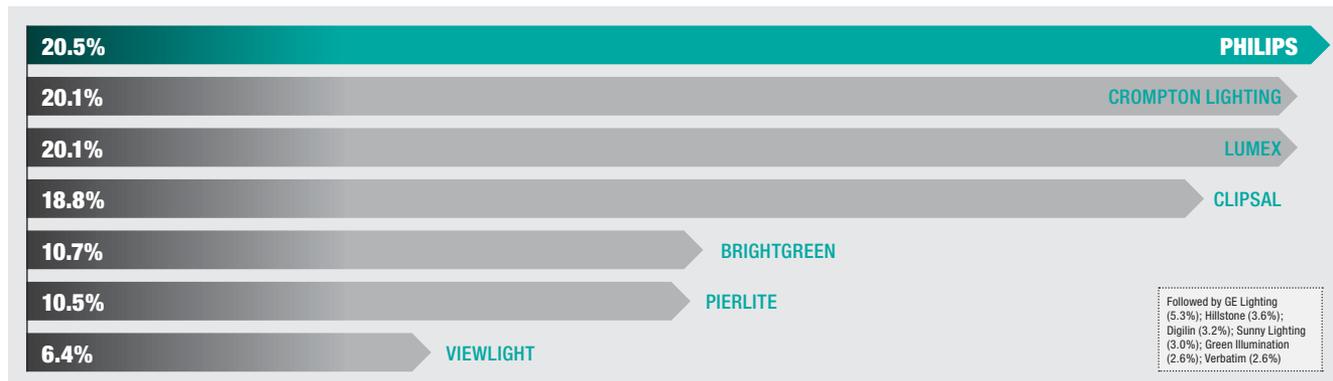


For the first time in three years, Panasonic has overtaken Cisco as the most popular telephony system. NEC has also dropped from third to fourth, with Samsung moving into third.





LED LIGHTING



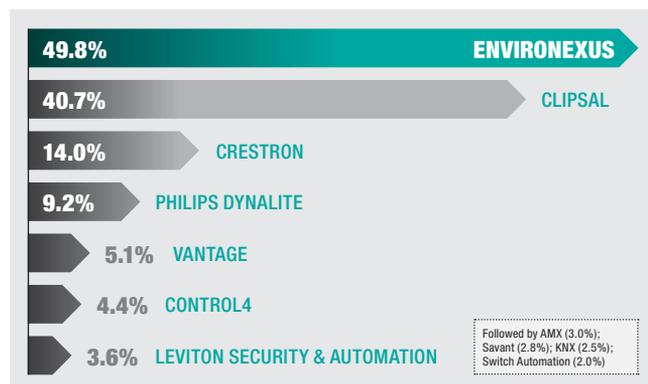
Last year, Philips dominated this category with a winning margin of 21%. In 2014, there is less than half a percent difference between first and third. Crompton has shown significant growth here and Clipsal, which was absent in 2013, has entered at number four.

ELECTRICAL ACCESSORIES



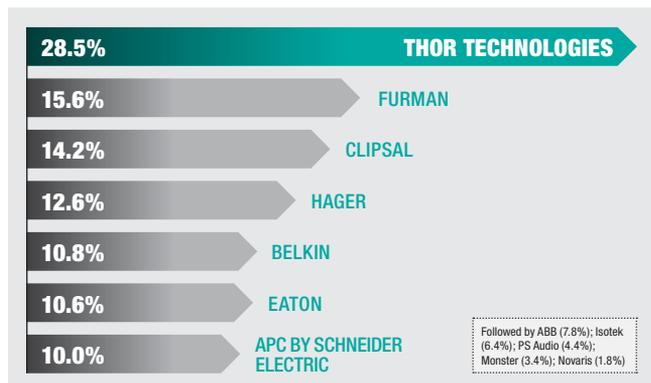
Clipsal's dominance in this category was all but assured, but last year's runner up has moved to fourth. Lumex and Sylvania are both new entries here and have strong designs on the category.

ENERGY MONITORING



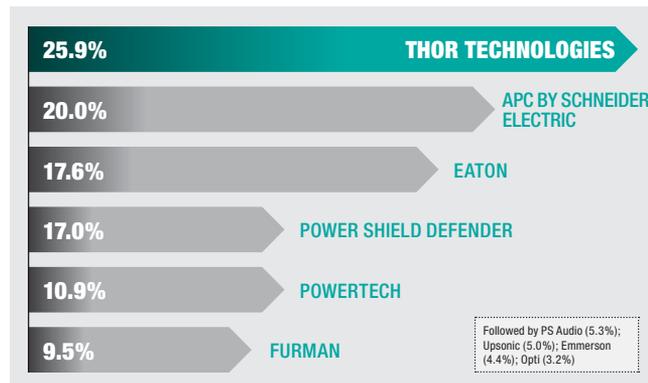
Perhaps the category with the most coverage by the mainstream media, the 2014 most popular energy monitoring solution is Environexus - a small Melbourne-based start-up.

SURGE PROTECTION



In another strong showing from a local supplier, Thor Technologies has taken out this title three years in a row. Furman moves into second place, overtaking Clipsal.

UPS



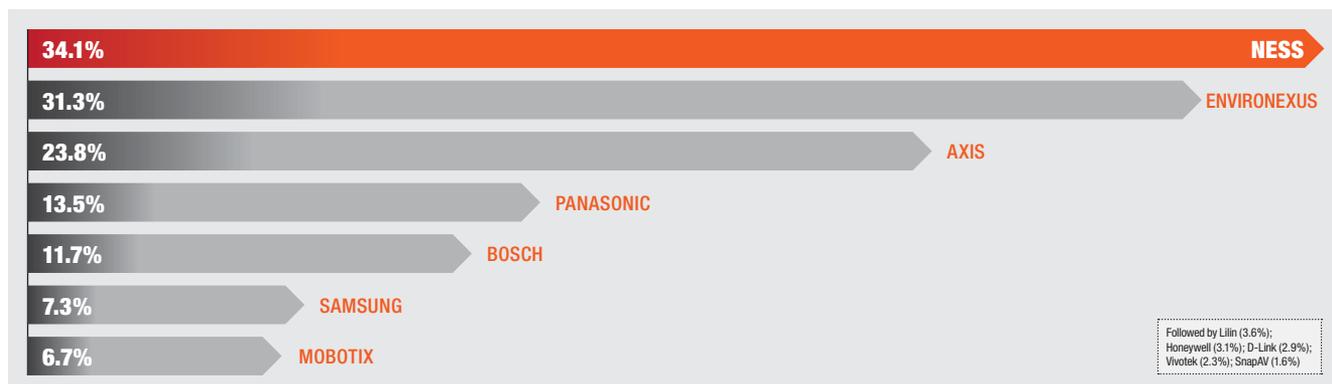
It has been a while since Thor Technologies actually supplied UPS to the market, but this is the second year the company has won this category. Eaton was second in 2013 with APC in third.





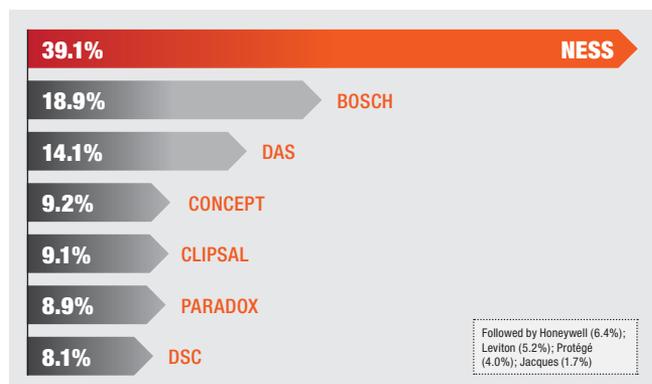
2014 SECURITY

IP SECURITY CAMERAS



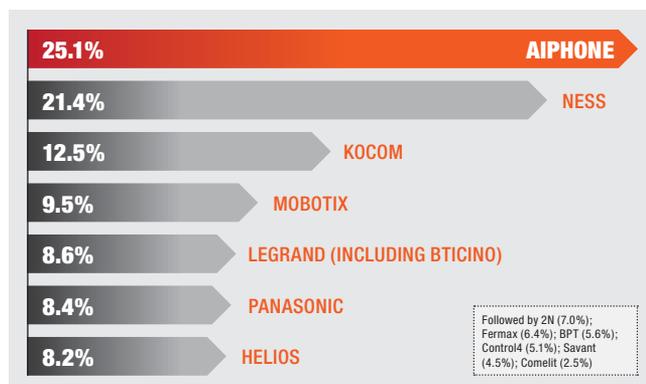
Ness retains its title in 2014 as the most popular supplier of IP security cameras, but once again Environexus has come out of nowhere to challenge for the lead. Could this be a sign of things to come? Axis moves down to third place while Panasonic increases its position to fourth.

SECURITY SYSTEMS



In a year marking the introduction of its new SmartLiving range, Ness has maintained its significant lead in the security system sector.

INTERCOM

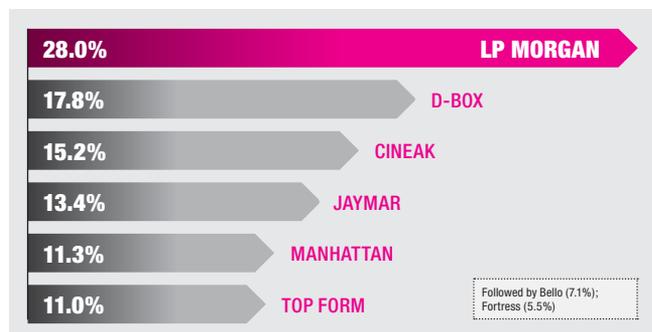


With a new distribution plan in place, Aiphone can thank Audio Products Group (APG) for helping it to retain this award.



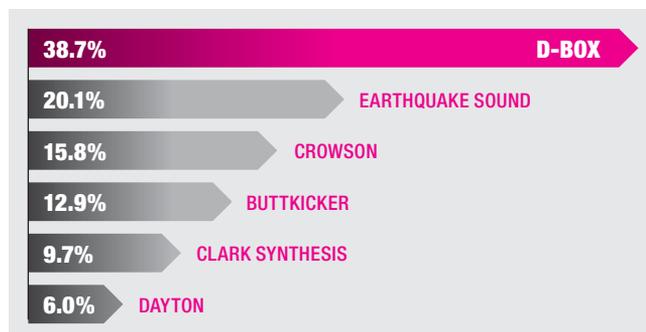
2014 SEATING

CINEMA SEATING



Once again, LP Morgan has been named Australia's most popular seating. Cineak is a new entry here, coming in at number three.

TACTILE SOUND TRANSDUCERS (SHAKERS)



A new category in 2014, D-Box clearly dominated this category, with Earthquake a respectable second.

