

Five Questions

INTERVIEW BY JOE PAONE

Helen M. Heneveld, President, Bedrock Learning



What's your most popular course?

Bedrock (bedrocklearning.com) has several online courses with strong enrollment – *Fundamentals for Electronic Systems Technicians*, *Project Management* and *Security*. I must also highlight Bedrock's newest course: *The Connected Home*. With the dramatic growth of the smart home, everyone needs to understand the industry and market. This course is the ideal primer for anyone – new hires, salespeople, marketers, technicians, receptionists, builders, designers and consumers. It explains in simple English what the Internet of Things is and how the industry delivers products and services to the market.

What new courses are you working on?

With the rapidly expanding use of Z-Wave products, the Bedrock team is excited to bring a short online course covering the principles of Z-Wave mesh networking. This new course, *Z-Wave Explained*, assumes no knowledge of the technology and covers what everyone needs to know to get up to speed with Z-Wave. Topics include creating a Z-Wave network, joining new devices, and optimizing signal range and responsiveness. Bedrock also just finished updating and streamlining to four hours the online course *Home Theater Explained* with the latest technologies including Atmos, 4K and streaming media.

What do you feel integrators most need to know about educating themselves?

Understanding the industry and having both technical skills and business acumen increases sales, improves productivity, lowers costs and builds the bottom line. There's a lot to learn, but with a solid foundation on the principles of different technologies as covered in Bedrock's online courses, integrators are well-prepared for manufacturers' product training. Learning is a life-long journey and in this industry, ongoing training is critical in order to keep up and excel. Many integrators don't invest in training, fearing their employees will leave and take that new knowledge with them, but imagine the impact if people aren't trained and they do stay?

What unique challenges have you faced as a woman in this industry, and how have you dealt with them?

There isn't enough time to share my many stories, but here are a couple. Back in the 1990s, I had my own installation company in conservative western Michigan. As a woman in that business climate, establishing technical credibility was a real challenge – so I hired a sales-man instead of a sales-woman. He would meet with clients, build rapport, and evaluate their needs and desires. Once he returned to the office with their project goals, I would design and layout the home automation system, and he would go back and close the deal. Despite being the person with the technical expertise designing the solutions, we often heard, "It scares me to see Helen on the job site with a tool belt on!"

As the first woman to join the CEDIA Board of Directors, my first board retreat was scheduled over a weekend in May with a visit to the Indy Raceway. That happened to be Mother's Day Sunday, and as a proud mother, I chose to miss the Indy experience and focus on what's most important – being home with family. My absence raised some important awareness, and no more CEDIA board meetings were scheduled over special occasions.

You've been involved with CEDIA since its inception. What's your favorite CEDIA story?

I've attended and taught at CEDIA EXPOs for 20-plus years, and never once saw a line at the women's restroom. Long ago, a young woman quietly approached me in the restroom to thank me for being a woman at the forefront of the industry, representing other women like herself, and paving the way. She shared that she was "just" a technician and too intimidated by all the men to speak up. I told her she had the knowledge, experience and power to step up, take charge, and make a difference. This became my message whenever I taught – calling on the women and empowering their voices. Fast-forward to last fall's show, where a woman came up when I was talking with a colleague and proclaimed, "Helen's a rock star in our industry, she's awesome!" She was once a technician and now owns the company she worked for. Success stories like that make me feel good about the hard work and perseverance I've given to overcome challenges, inspire other women, and contribute to the industry. **TI**



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