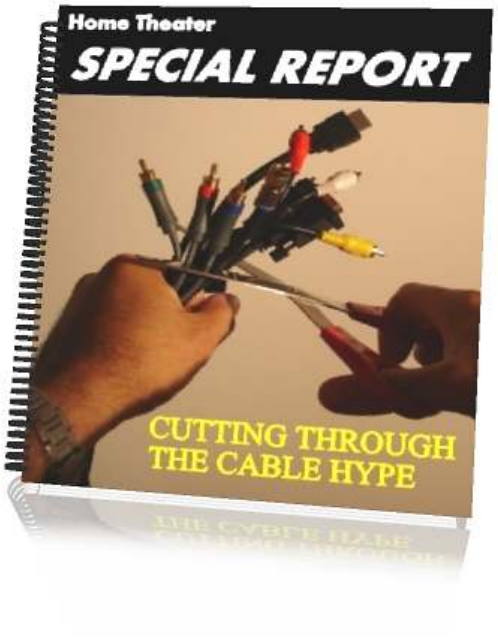

Home Theater

SPECIAL REPORT

CUTTING THROUGH
THE CABLE HYPE

www.myhometheatersecrets.com

Cable Challenged? Not Anymore!

I've been asked to write the *Special Report* and make it available to my subscribers since many of you are cable "challenged"… time to change that.

There are a number of different ways for you to hook up all those fancy boxes that convert your DVDs and satellite signals into the video and audio that we love… we do that by using home theater cables.

In building my 11 seat home theater in my basement, I did quite a bit of research into the different kinds of cables that can be used in a setup. I've learned that there is a quality hierarchy that lists the different formats.

Cable information is spread all over the Internet, and if you've got a week or so, you can go searching for yourself. There is one thing that you should know before you start your research… the Internet has become a place of garbage.

Gone are the days that let you search freely for good information, from people that actually knew what they were talking about. Right now, searches produce a number of sites that are designed to sell you cables, and unfortunately the information you're going to get from these sites are biased towards the products that they are selling.

That's where this special report comes in handy. I've spent a lot of time researching cables over the past 10 years, and now I'm going to spend a lot of time trying to write this report in a clear, concise way… so you're not in the dark anymore.

Boy, Times Sure Have Changed

There once was a simpler time when all you did to get good television was to take that black cable that came out of the wall and hooked it up to your TV. We never really cared about what that black cable was attached to, but we all knew that it was attached to some sort of antenna on the roof. Turn the dial on the black box that sat next to the TV so you could get the best reception, and voila! You were watching TV.

Remember the audio? How simpler could it have gotten? Dolby digital and DTS weren't born yet. No speaker wires to hide, no speakers to position correctly throughout the room… we were just glad to hear anything out of that 6 inch speaker hidden inside the TV.

Times sure have changed… now you have to make sure your HDTV is 1080p, your satellite dish is pointed in the right direction, and check to see if you're on Video1 or Video2.

How does one make sense of it all?

With the explosion of the HDTV market, the cost to own one of these babies has dropped considerably. The manufacturers became smart and started bundling these HDTVs with the "theater in a box" which basically gave you all the parts to build your own home theater.

Of course, when you buy a "home theater in a box", the cables that you get are "for the masses", which basically means someone at the factory sat down one day and came up with the average cable lengths needed to satisfy the majority of customers.

So, that 3 foot HDMI cable that came with your system will probably be long enough for the majority of their customers, but not for everyone… what if you wanted to install your components further away from your HDTV than the 3 ft cable would allow? What if you just hung your plasma on the wall and wanted to put your components tucked away in the corner of the room?

That 3 foot HDMI cable is just not going to do it.

So this is a good starting place. Let's supposed you have to go above and beyond what you thought you might have to do… you need to buy new cables, but don't have a clue what they're called or what they're for…

Let's cut through that CABLE hype and get you what you need…

Cutting Through The Cable Hype

Okay, you need to realize something before we start:

> **Cable:** A strand of steel wire, or copper wire, usually covered with some protecting or insulating substance

So in other words, a cable is basically a covered wire that is used to transfer some sort of information from one end to the other… in our home theater world, that information will be audio and video information.

That's it… just a wire.

Walk into an electronics store these days and you will be swamped with cables that the salesperson will claim are "The Holy Grail" of home theater connectivity. They'll show you cables that they say will "revolutionize" your home theater.

Don't get sucked into the hype.

Sure, you still need to pay attention to the limitations and lengths of the cable that could cause you problems with your particular setup, but don't throw yourself into a cable buying frenzy because the salesperson got you all worked up.

Truth be told, the standard quality cable will transfer information adequately for 95% of people with standard setups. The other 5% are one of the following:

1) The person building the $100,000 theater in their mansion
2) The person caught in "upgrade hell"
3) The person with cable envy
4) The audiophiles and "hard core" video guys

I have never been in 1) or 4)… but I have been in 2)… number 3) is something I don't think I want to talk about here, I mean, I hardly know you. (wink wink, nudge nudge).

There are those out there that buy the top notch cables because they believe it is going to make a difference in their home theater experience, but based on my research, they are wasting their money.

Can you really hear the difference between speaker cable that costs $1 per foot and the speaker cable that costs $20 per foot? If you think you can, check your speakers because the $1 per foot cable most likely covers the speaker's frequency range. That's right… the speaker now becomes the issue, not the cable.

The $20 per foot cable may be able to send the speaker a wider range of frequencies, but the speaker can't do anything with it… so be careful.

There's one thing I can do for you to help you cut through the hype. I can supply you with information that will help you make the proper decision.

Based on the email I get, I've taken 8 cables that are most common in home theaters, and based on my research, have dedicated a full page to describe each one.

I have broken each cable description into 3 parts. The first part contains a picture of the cable/connection, the second part is a quick summary, and the third is more detailed information that I believe is important for you to know.

One more thing…

I've put information in these pages as a guideline based on standard cables… there could be variations based on what you might have in your setup. So, if I state that the maximum length of a certain cable is 40 feet, don't email me to tell me that you've got one that is 60 feet and it works just fine. Yes, I know… these are just guidelines.

Coaxial Cable

RF coaxial cable

Digital coaxial cable

Name: RF Coaxial cable and Digital Coaxial cable

Color: RF Coaxial cable – usually black, can also come in white
Digital Coaxial cable – usually black, can also come in white

Uses: RF Coaxial cable – transfers audio AND video
Digital Coaxial cable – transfers audio ONLY

Connector: RF Coaxial cable – thin "needle" surrounded by a threaded ring ("F" jack)
Digital Coaxial cable – RCA type

Max Length **(standard cable: RF):** approx 1600ft
(standard cable: Digital): approx 33ft

Ahhhh… our old friend coaxial… I think everyone has had experience with this guy. The basic coaxial cables are used to transfer television signals (audio and video) from an antennae, cable box, satellite dish or VCR.

Coaxial is just a thick wire… it's basically a thin wire covered by multiple layers of rubber, insulation and covered by a tough plastic. Since the inner wire is insulated by all these layers, there is little interference from outside signals.

Now, you may not know this, but there is a "new and improved" type of coaxial cable out there… it is called "Digital Coaxial Cable"

Digital Coaxial cable has only one purpose… to transfer digital audio. This, of course, is different than the regular coaxial cable that transfers both audio and video. What we're doing here with digital coaxial is dedicating the entire wire's bandwidth to the transfer of audio. This increases the quality of your home theater audio to a higher level.

You'll notice one more difference between the digital and regular coaxial cables… the connectors. The regular coaxial has a connector that looks like a needle, whereas the digital is an RCA connector (a thicker rounder end).

RCA (Composite) Cables

RCA cables

RCA connection

Adapter to join 2 cables

Name: RCA cables, or
Analogue audio & video cables, or
Composite audio & video cables

Color: Yellow connector – transfers video
Red connector – transfers right channel audio
White connector – transfers left channel audio

Uses: Transfers analog video and audio

Connector: Standard RCA type

Max Length (standard cable): approx 40ft

The cables are named "RCA" cables because they were introduced by the "Radio Corporation of America" to allow the connection between their phonographs to amplifiers.

These cables are quite common… you usually get these in the box with your component. Each cable represents a different signal… yellow is video, red is right audio and white is left audio.

Although these cable are quite common, there is one distinct disadvantage to using these cables: one cable for each signal. For example, a VCR can have 3 RCA cables going in, and 3 RCA cables coming out. By adding more and more components to your setup using these cables will create a "cable salad".

Another disadvantage comes with interference… most of these cables do not contain a layer of insulation that would stop outside signals, and are therefore "unshielded". They can become easily unbalanced due to outside signals creeping in, and audio/video become compromised. For the most part, they work just fine for the simple setup.