

## Who Buys an Earth Station?

By Fred Hopengarten

**T**he question comes up time and again: Who buys an earth station? Those who sell high-quality systems, with parts manufactured by established companies, can expect a buyer like the following:

**A Man:** Women make a reasonable number of inquiries about satellite TV, but women rarely decide to buy a unit. Satellite TV remains almost exclusively a male avocation.

**Rural or Semi-rural:** Predictably, men who buy earth stations live in areas that do not have cable TV and are not likely to be wired soon.

This, of course, is reasonable. Why should someone spend \$10,000 for a service he can buy for \$25 a month? Due to low angles of elevation for RCA's SATCOM F1 satellite in the eastern United States, earth station buyers normally own a fair size piece of property. In fact, unless a person owns more than an acre of land, he is unlikely to buy a satellite TV system. Few families are willing to give up a substantial proportion of their backyards for television.

**Inquisitive and Intelligent:** True customers ask tough questions. Though not necessarily college educated, they understand how to ask questions which test the skills of most salespeople.

**A Family Man:** In these days of divorces and high living, it is encouraging—and perhaps a little unusual—that satellite TV customers tend to be crazy about their wives and kids. They lead home-centered lives. Generally these men work hard. When they relax, they want to be at home with their families.

**VCR Owners:** Satellite TV customers almost always own a video-cassette recorder. Usually they do not buy it for use with an earth dish. Instead, the VCR is an earlier hobby that becomes ignored with satellite TV. After all, with 23 to 55 channels of reception available, why bother taping anything?

Few customers for satellite systems are hobbyists or engineers. They are men who enjoy the variety and entertainment aspects of reception, without being overwhelmed with the technology.

**Willing to Make Decisions:** Frequently, customers have built or substantially remodeled their houses. They often work for themselves, either as professionals or small businessmen. They put a great deal of energy into these businesses and they make decisions all the time involving large amounts of money.

**They Understand the Quality/Cost Relationship:** Customers seem to drive fairly expensive cars, which are well-maintained. Their homes are well-maintained, too. Since no manufacturer has yet been able to finance earth station purchases the way GM finances autos, these men can afford to pay cash for their systems.

**A Specific Need:** Finally, there is usually some need that customers point to which leads them to buy earth stations. Some of the needs are:

- a convalescent wife,
- a long distance to the nearest movie house or restaurant, or
- a long working day, which means the buyer cannot catch the news when Dan Rather is ready to deliver it.

**Unlikely Customers:** Here are some consumer comments which indicate to the savvy salesperson that a sale is unlikely:

- “A few of us were thinking about sharing the costs.”
- “I was thinking about putting one of these things on my roof.”
- “My address is: 381 E. 79th Street, Apt. 14F.”
- “I'm calling for my father who lives in (a country in Africa, Asia, the Middle East).”

Unfortunately, the earth dish market is limited. It is limited to those who: can afford it, own their own homes, have a clear view of the Southwestern sky, have a wife who will tolerate the presence of a big dish in the backyard, and have a willingness to be one of the first in the area to buy an expensive electronics system.

It's not for everyone. □

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