

WHAT

The smart home industry is changing, and we are seeing more and more women get involved, at all levels – be it sales, marketing, design or as business owners. This has been reflected on the new CEDIA EMEA Board of Directors, which now includes two women.

WOMEN

In an industry that has traditionally been male-orientated, it is encouraging to see women get involved, and make their mark. CEDIA talks to six successful women in the industry to find out their opinions on this change.

WANT



Shereen Edward

Regional Head of Engineering and Design, Archimedia, Egypt



Karen Chugg

Managing Director, Intelligent Abodes



Babs Moore

Director, Amina Technologies



Di Stickland

Business Development Director, Design Innovation



Melanie Malcolm

Director, Bespoke Home Cinemas



Laura Lazzerini Neuwirth

Project Manager, Studio Lgl, Italy

Why is it important to have women in the industry?

SE As 50% of the population are women, why shouldn't our industry also represent that! I am always struck by just how male dominated the industry is when I attend shows and events. From a CEDIA perspective, having more women involved will help change these events from feeling a like a boys club.

KC Women and men bring a different perspective and when those complementary skills work together, they can enhance any business. We are promoting our services to both men and women, and the lack of women in the industry, has resulted in a large percentage of our consumers disengaging, as they have no one they can relate to. Having more women in the industry should result in a larger market for the smart home industry.

BM More women are needed in the industry to reduce the feeling that it is an industry for boys' toys or gadget men. Our industry provides products and solutions that improve the enjoyment, safety and ease of use of our homes, and both men and women play a role in delivering this.

DS I think it's important for there to be female experts for homeowners to relate to. Often, home technology is sold to a couple rather than an individual, and whilst stereotypically it will be a man who pushes for the technology, the lady of the house often has the last say in how money is prioritised. It's important for them to feel comfortable with what is going into their home and speaking to another woman can really help with this.

There are undoubtedly women that would be a great asset to this industry, but they have never gone into it because it is so male dominated, and therefore we have missed out on some brilliant minds who have taken their talents into other sectors.

MM It's important to have

more women in the industry to enable any organisation to grow. With a balanced representation, women can focus on certain areas that often are not utilised to their full potential.

LLN Women and men have a different approach to business and in dealing with clients, based on different skills. I believe that the best results can be achieved with a team that includes both men and women.

What value does a woman's perspective give to the business?

SE The systems that we design are used as much by women as they are by men. Whilst this does not make that much difference to their designs, often women value real world benefits rather than simply focussing on features.

KC This relates to the talent of the individual and whether they are used effectively in their workplace. In our business, my expertise is client interface. I have honed my detective skills, acquired sufficient knowledge of the industry and that, together with some patience and a dash of humour, enables me to produce a solution that will meet the client's needs and budget.

BM Women understand that most people want functionality and aren't so bothered by the finer technical details. In many families, it is still the woman who spends most time at the home, and perhaps has a greater understanding of what functionality they need in their home, so it is important for them to have someone to explain this to them.

DS All businesses will benefit from a variety of perspectives. From management skills through to business strategy and on to client liaison and marketing, it is important to consider a variety of opinions. Women often bring an alternative viewpoint to a scenario, as it is well documented that they approach problem solving in a

different way to men, and this can be very beneficial to gain balance within a business.

MM At Bespoke, all the initial introductions to the company are by me. I'm the person they connect with and then I introduce design and sales. We find clients, suppliers, architects and interior designers engage more and gain our trust. We often find the female clients prefer to deal with me direct so I do believe that a woman's perspective is really important to the business.

LLN The value is in a deep understanding of client requirements and needs, not only with regards to the purely technical aspects of the project, but also to the aesthetics and the ease of use of the control systems.

How does a woman's approach to clients differ?

SE When dealing with families, the wife is often the decision maker. They will often find it easier and more comfortable to deal with another woman when discussing their new systems. Additionally, interior design is a very female dominated industry and relationships with designers can be easier if the integration company has women on the team.

KC With clients, I recognise the pressure of family life and work, so offer greater support to help clients manage the challenges of renovations or new build works.

In situations where one party, often the woman, is not engaging with the process, I will modify my approach until they see the benefits for them

and understand what home automation could do for them.

BM Women have a great way of listening and understanding what clients want and they focus on selling solutions rather than technology for technology sake.

DS The most important thing to realise is that every client needs to be handled differently and having a variety of personalities within a company makes it easier to find the right person to deal with each situation.

MM A women's approach to a client differs as we tend to deliver the message in a less technical approach. Often, our female clients just want to find out simply how everything works to make their life easier and not what goes into making it work.

LLN The woman's approach is more oriented to the use of the soft skills, to psychology and to aesthetics as well. While some years ago, it was still acceptable to have the electronic components visible in a house or a yacht, today aesthetics plays a key role in the success of a project.

Why is this industry male orientated?

SE Men do like their toys and gadgets! This has probably led to many men wanting to turn their hobbies into their careers. Generally though, any career which is engineering focussed tends to be male dominated.

KC Many of the experts in this industry are from engineering, IT, electrical – all industries that are male dominated. I have learnt that many men like to talk to men, presumably because they can relate better and they assume they will



speak the same language.

BM A lot of people in the industry have come from a Hi-Fi, IT or construction background, all of which are male dominated. Also, amongst my own friends, I see a lot more men interested in gadgets and want to understand what is possible and how something works, while my female friends want things that make their lives easier, safer and more enjoyable, without cluttering up their houses.

DS I think this goes right back to schooling. Very few women are encouraged into practical jobs, manual jobs or engineering roles, all of which could lead you to this industry. You have to be fairly self-assured to take that route in the first place, knowing full well you will be in a minority. Things are slowly improving and from what I've seen, are much better today than they were when I was starting out in engineering.

MM The industry is male orientated because it's driven by male installers, contractors and sales agents. Only a small percentage of women work in these roles and it's often difficult for women to prove themselves in these types of roles.

LLN It arises from science and engineering jobs that have, historically, been a male arena. At Studio LGL, we work on yacht projects across Europe and, when I go on board for the first time for a new project, the people involved often think that I'm the interior designer.

Why would you encourage women to join this industry?

SE It's a fun industry and incredibly diverse. I'm an engineer and this industry has allowed me to be creative whilst applying my engineering skills to very human centred designs.

KC It's an enjoyable industry that is growing so the possibilities are still unfolding.

BM I had no idea that such an exciting industry even existed before I joined. The more people that are involved and know about what CEDIA and the industry does, the more the word will spread and with it, the opportunity for growth for all.

DS I would encourage anyone with an aptitude in this area to join the industry. The smart home industry is one of the biggest growing industries in the UK and the potential in this market is huge. We should all be grabbing every opportunity we can while the technology rapidly evolves around us.

MM There are lots of opportunities and areas to get involved in. I'm passionate about the education of our industry and if we can encourage more girls at high school and college to explore STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) then this could open doors for them in the future.

LLN This industry is full of challenges and, if you are curious, you never stop learning something new, both from a technical and a human point of view.

