

## Evaluating Your Options: Dealer Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Choosing and implementing a monitoring and support solution for your integration business is an important decision. To help clarify some of the confusion and ensure you are making informed decisions we have developed the following list of questions that you should be asking when evaluating these solutions as well as some insight into answering each of these questions.

Dealer Questions and Answers

### [Do I want to have a single point of management for all of my client systems?](#)

Since Invision is a cloud based solution you are able to log in through a single portal with one user name and password to access and manage all of your client installations. It was designed with scalability and successful implementation in mind, which allows for significant time savings whenever a change needs to be made at one or more client sites.

To the contrary, non cloud-based systems require each client site to be maintained separately and independently, meaning that in order to make changes those systems would require logging in to each client site and making the same changes over and over again until all have been updated. This is an outdated, inefficient and ineffective way to accomplish a simple task, and as such limits the true benefit of remote monitoring services.

### [Do I want the convenience of a unified interface regardless of manufacturer, product, or size?](#)

Yes, you do. One of ihiji's greatest strengths is the close partnerships we form with industry manufacturers. We are brand-agnostic, meaning that we understand installations often will contain products from many different manufacturers, and have designed Invision to easily manage them all. For instance, a dealer that installs Crestron, AMX, and Control4, does not have to use three different tools to maintain each of the installations. Or, if for example, a job initially used APC IP products but was upgraded later with additional Panamax IP-based power equipment, the dealer can use ihiji Invision to manage all of this equipment, from one central location. Only Invision offers this level of simplicity.

### [Is the shift to cloud computing by companies like Amazon, Apple, Google, Microsoft and Netflix only a fad or is it a trend for future success?](#)

The limitations of client-server architecture that peaked in the 1990's has led to a massive shift in the way that computing power is distributed globally. The cloud is most certainly not a fad, it is the future of computing.

Here at ihiji, we firmly believe that the future resides in the cloud and our team has been committed to a secure and ultra-reliable cloud architecture since we began designing Invision back in 2005.

For dealers, the benefits and convenience of a cloud-based system are undeniable, providing the following and more:

- reliability
- low maintenance
- limited configuration management
- distributed performance for scalability
- global accessibility
- low cost
- automated backups

### [Is there really a need to manage all IP power products from a unified management and support interface?](#)

Of course there is! The Invision solution was designed for the Custom Integrator and understands that a single manufacturer does not always fit the needs of each and every client. That's why you carry different brands and provide different solutions.

To better serve your needs, ihiji not only provides power control but the power of cloud based power control to all of your IP-enabled power management devices including APC, Dataprobe, Furman, MinuteMan, Panamax, PS Audio, and Tripp Lite. Our cloud based power control focuses on standardizing the user interface regardless of manufacturer and model, simplifying the configuration of power devices with drag and drop assignment, and streamlining the process for reboots so that you no longer have to use multiple manufacturer tools, rename outlets or document plugs on equipment.

### [Do I want the ability to monitor CresNet, zigbee, RS-232, AxLink and other A/V equipment in new and existing installations?](#)

The Invision solution was designed by Custom Integrators specifically for Custom Integrators, to help manage the challenges you face on a daily basis and provide a way for you to support your clients efficiently and effectively.

Invision exists because we understand that a re-branded IT solution that only monitors IP devices with SNMP is not enough! Although extremely powerful and complex, IT monitoring solutions are limited and do not easily provide an interface for monitoring the legacy and proprietary equipment installed in the large majority of home automation and entertainment systems. This is why the IT industry standard SNMP is not widely adopted by CE and Home Automation manufacturers.

ihiji Invision is the only solution to offer custom modules for A/V equipment, uniform integration with all power management equipment, and advanced compatibility with Crestron, Control4, and AMX. Monitoring all levels of the installation including CresNet, AxLink, Zigbee and RS-232 devices is critical for delivering quality service and troubleshooting for your client base.

*Do I want to deploy a Windows enterprise grade server at every install?*

There are a number of factors you need to consider including Reliability, Security, Cost, and Energy Use.

**RELIABILITY & SECURITY:** There are constant security vulnerabilities with Windows and to combat this, Microsoft releases monthly (occasionally more often) patches and upgrades. Additionally, Windows machines are more prone to virus threats and therefore require up to date antivirus software to run at all times and the occasional upgrades of this software. Furthermore, allowing your technicians to use your company's in-house monitoring server not only for remote access and programming but also for the use of third party software, for example to browse the internet, could lead to additional security threats requiring resolution. The ihiji invasion solution has been developed on a Linux platform, which provides an ultra-reliable and easily upgradable solution. The appliance is single purpose which means we have removed any software not specifically required for monitoring and support. This leads to a more reliable and secure solution. In fact, there is no way for a dealer or technician to log into our appliance to install rouge software.

**COST:** Windows requires an expensive license, starting at over \$1,000, and significantly more powerful hardware to operate. These costs are inevitably passed on to the you, the dealer. There are also significant setup and installation costs as well as an extremely high cost of maintaining and upgrading each individual server. Keep in mind a highly trained IT technician is required for any of these tasks. Should any of the parts on the server fail not only are the replacement pieces expensive but there is a big time commitment to re-installing and configuring failed servers. There are also significant energy costs in running an enterprise server in the home. A typical server runs at least a 450W power supply and potentially redundant power supplies. If you operate this server 24/7/365, which is required for remote monitoring, the annual power consumption bill to the consumer could be \$700 or more! ihiji's appliance only draws 13 watts and therefore only costs approximately \$20 per year!

A stark contrast to the cost and constraints of Windows, ihiji chose to develop invasion on a Linux platform, which provides a lower cost yet ultra-reliable and easily upgradable solution. The dedicated appliance has no interface to access, disallowing the installation of other applications and thereby eliminating the risk of third-party software interfering with the support software.

There are no embedded third party licensing fees that you are paying. The ihiji appliance itself is the least expensive monitoring appliance on the market. There is very little field installation and that installation can be performed by an entry level technician. We have eliminated the pieces of hardware that are most likely to fail, reducing hardware support expenses. All system configurations are maintained in our cloud servers so should the appliance need to be replaced there is no reconfiguration necessary.

**ENERGY:** Installing an enterprise grade server takes space, time and a considerable amount of energy. This hardware contains a spinning hard drive and fans to keep that hard drive from overheating. In contrast, the ihiji invasion appliance has no spinning hard drive and is passively cooled. Installing the appliance is as easy as plugging in an Ethernet cable. Additionally, the ihiji invasion appliance is the most energy efficient monitoring appliance in the industry resulting in reduced energy costs for the homeowner while increasing system reliability for the service provider.

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**BUT I REALLY WANT A REMOTE SERVER:** If you want a remote server for programming, we recommend using an inexpensive PC with secure remote VPN access through a router or firewall. Long story short, an enterprise grade server for the simple task of remote monitoring and diagnostics is inefficient, full of hardware limitations and prone to failure. Much like driving a tank through Manhattan – sure it's powerful but is that really the smartest way to get around?

*Do I have the expertise to manage the servers and upgrades required?*

ihiji is dedicated to delivering simple solutions that address complex challenges, and invasion was designed to be just that.

Updates are automatically installed, which means no field updates, no firmware or software updates.

By eliminating many complex and unnecessary functions found in commercial or enterprise-grade monitoring tools, invasion makes it easy for less technical staff to configure and use the system. This provides an opportunity for dealers to use their staff more efficiently, so more time is spent on billable hours, rather than in-house systems maintenance.

*What about upgrades? Are they hard to install and do they cost extra?*

At ihiji, we believe in simplicity. In fact, our annual fee includes regular upgrades and additions that automatically appear in the system without any interaction by the dealer. You see, we developed the product from the ground-up and maintain an aggressive continuous development cycle. Meaning, when dealers request changes or provide feedback, our engineers are able to deploy those changes immediately, effecting change in as little as a few minutes. We then make these instantly available to all of our dealers for no extra cost and without any additional work. For example, over the past few months we have added integration with power management devices, Crestron, AMX, and Control4 advanced capabilities, as well as tier one troubleshooting features, all at no cost to our dealers. Simple and easy, just as it should be.

Conversely, in a client-server architecture where the software does not reside in the cloud (such as is the case with most other IT and industry solutions), dealers are responsible for purchasing new "versions" of the software (think DOS, Windows 3.1, 97, ME, XP, Vista, 7) and manually upgrading all of those servers in the field individually. That process must again be replicated any time an upgrade is required, which includes routine security patches. Ouch! Think of the maintenance requirements to update, upgrade, or simply maintain each piece of hardware, independently. It is a huge time and resource killer because most of these upgrades would be performed on-site by a highly trained IT technicians.

*As opposed to the quick and simple invasion setup, what is the time and true expense required to configure complex IT monitoring solutions for each installation?*

There are considerable expense and resource requirements associated with the more complex monitoring systems that have been re-badged for use in this channel. These items include the time required for:

- Operating system patches
- Security patches
- Software upgrades
- Broken dependencies
- Remembering configuration methods
- Auto-discovery filtering
- "Tweaking" alerts
- Hardware failures
- Power consumption

In traditional IT monitoring systems these are all very complex and time-consuming tasks. Due to the equipment differences between each client system, these complexities are magnified as you start from scratch every time you configure a system.

A consideration indeed, dealers are urged to do a comprehensive review of all available systems in order to make the best decision for their company and client needs.

*[Do I want to forward ports on each client system in order to gain remote access?](#)*

Port forwarding is not only difficult to manage and maintain but it is also insecure. Instead, create a more secure and stable gateway by using the ihiji inversion appliance, which is completely plug and play; just plug it in and walk away. All configuration and management is then done securely through ihiji's cloud servers, and inversion does not rely on port forwarding or open any holes in the firewall.

*[Should I be selling remote monitoring as part of my service contract offering?](#)*

Unequivocally, Yes! You see, ihiji has always been committed to the CEDIA channel. Actively involved as educators and innovators, our mission is to help dealers improve their bottom line.

Times have changed, and so has the Custom Installation industry. Today, it is no longer only about selling boxes, it is about service and quickly embracing an evolving technical environment and it will require dealers to differentiate themselves by the services you're able to provide.

We see a paradigm shift happening in the industry that is very similar to that which the auto industry or IT industry has already experienced. Service agreements are now established with clients, allowing for proactive systems maintenance and providing a defensible presence in the home (or office or client location?). Deviations and outages are dramatically reduced and customer service metrics are vastly improved.

Creating sustainable service and recurring business models serve a multifaceted purpose: creating a healthy recurring revenue stream, strengthening client relationships and building a uniquely differentiated product and service portfolio.

Keeping it simple, ihiji provides dealers low cost options that can easily be absorbed and justified over multiple years, without needing to change their model or implement a service contract strategy.

Want to learn more? ihiji is working with CEDIA to create a CEDIA University service contract course, which we hope to execute soon. In the meantime, you can learn more about selling service contracts by [clicking here](#). Tweet a message to [@ihiji](#) or send us a [Facebook](#) message and we will email you the password.

*[Do I support a competing integration firm when I purchase other industry monitoring tools?](#)*

ihiji has no ownership or potential conflict of interest with any integration firm. In today's global marketplace you should be concerned. More than ever dealers are doing jobs not only in their local market but in other regions and even abroad, it means you could easily be competing against a company you are also supporting through the purchase of their monitoring products.

Although ihiji was developed the inversion solution when we owned our South Florida integration firm, the ihiji principals previously recognized there would come a day when a potential conflict of interest such as this could conceivably occur. To avoid such an issue and to focus our attention on the ongoing development of inversion, we chose to sell our interest in the firm and relocate ihiji to Austin, TX.

However, this type of conflict of interest is present with other remote monitoring and security companies selling to custom integrators. Be sure to ask any potential monitoring company their outside business interests and potential conflicts. Could you be supporting your competitor?

*[Why would I not use the IT software behind some of the other industry tools and develop my own solution?](#)*

Scope and scale, for starters. ihiji is perplexed as to why any integration company would pay a company to re-brand or serve as a 3rd party broker of available IT resources. Having been integrators ourselves, we tried and trialed the available IT solutions only to find that each fell short of our needs and ultimately provided only added expense and overhead, not the solution that was touted.

ihiji's value is clearly demonstrated by the design and implementation of its user interfaces, and by the unequalled support provided by a team dedicated to the channel and the continuous development of simple and intelligent solutions.

For examples of other solutions check out:

<http://www.kratosdefense.com/>

<http://www.centreon.com/>

<http://www.n-able.com>

*If the employee who managed our servers leaves our company for any reason will I have to go back to EVERY existing installation and manually change the configuration one by one?*

Not with the ihiji invisio solution. Dealers can easily make administrative changes, propagating all associated installations with only a few clicks. It's quick and easy, which is how it should be. We prefer to make things simple.

However, using remote servers as a part of your monitoring solution means you have to log into each and every installation, updating profiles, changing passwords and settings. This could take a considerable amount of time, depending on the number of installations in the field and the resources available within your company to make it happen. When time is of the essence, which it often is when an employee leaves, the last thing you need is an involved process to remove their credentials. Imagine the security breach that is possible and the negative effects one would have on your business. It could be catastrophic.

Ihiji believes that updates, upgrades and changes to the configuration of the monitoring solution should be simple to execute and implement, such as it is with invisio.