



The year coming to a close is a time for both celebration and contemplation, especially when the year was as tumultuous as that known as 2018. In our case we ponder about the year in residential installation, so join us as we take a look at what we believe were the biggest stories.

EU Fines Vendors for Price Fixing: [The European Commission fines Asus, Denon & Marantz, Philips and Pioneer](#) for breaking EU antitrust rules, leading to higher prices for "kitchen appliances, hair dryers, notebook computers, headphones and many other products." Of the four, Pioneer is arguably the biggest offender according to the EU, since it not only indulged in resale price management, but also limited the ability of retailers to sell-cross border to customers in other member states. Such behaviour took place during 2011-2013 and concerned 12 countries (Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway).

Control4 Opens Global Showroom Network: In a bid to direct homeowners, architects and designer to smart home solutions [Control4 launches #C4Yourself](#), a global initiative held in in 25 markets around the world. Held on 31 May 2018 in partnership with Control4 dealers, the initiative sees the company open new experiential dealer showrooms in the UK, US, Canada, China and Australia. Customers in cities around the world can find a Certified Showroom location using the online Control4 Dealer Locator, before registering to attend a local #C4Yourself Day event.

Aqipa Buys Onkyo, Pioneer Europe Assets: [Aqipa GmbH acquired Onkyo and Pioneer Europe](#) in a €140 million deal that sees the distributor taking over all activities involving the Pioneer, Onkyo, Integra, Teac and Esoteric brands in Europe. The deal sees the transfer of all business activities relating to sales, marketing, after sales service, customer care, finance, spare parts and distribution for the brands Pioneer, Onkyo, Integra, Teac and Esoteric in Europe to Aqipa.

McIntosh Presents "Entry-Level" MT2 Turntable: McIntosh announced the [MT2](#), an audiophile-grade turntable able to play both 33.3 and 45rpm records the company claims ships "virtually ready to use out of the box." It features tracking force, anti-skate force, cartridge overhang and arm height preset in the factory, and as such should be plug 'n' play.

8K TV on the Rise: Customers might still be getting used to 4K TV, but the industry is already gearing for something even bigger. In the case of TV this is, of course, 8K TV, as both [Samsung](#) and [LG](#) have sets featuring such resolutions ready for release. Admittedly there is nothing through which to enjoy the full capabilities of such TVs should you own one-- unless you live in Japan, where [8K broadcasts are already taking place.](#)

The Facebook Videochatting Device: Facebook unveiled a long rumoured foray into hardware with the [Portal](#), a videoconferencing device consisting, essentially, of a tablet-style display, AI-powered cameras able to track users around the room, a 4-mic array and Alexa capability. Allowing for the aforementioned videochatting are a 12MP camera with a wide 140-degree field of view and what Facebook calls Smart Camera, an AI technology promising to detect the user and constantly centre them on screen, even while they are moving around during a call.

A Year in Smart Speakers: Smart Speakers truly entered the mainstream in 2018, reaching 75 million according to Canalys. Amazon has the most popular product on the market in the shape of the Echo range, but other vendors are close behind. These include Google and its Assistant, while 2nd biggest global market (following the US) China has homegrown solutions from the likes of Alibaba and Xiaomi.

Amazon Wants Alexa Everywhere-- Even the Microwave: A surprise Amazon event has the online book retailer turned cloud and hardware giant present a list of Alexa-powered devices refreshed and new as long as your arm, with the most surprising offering being [an Amazon microwave](#). No, really. Released under the AmazonBasics brand, the smart microwave offers Alexa controls and a Dash button allowing one to instantly order popcorn. It does not have built-in voice control, but pairing with a nearby Echo device provides such functionality. It offers 700W

Top 8 for ECI's 2018

Written by Marco Attard
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of power and has a number of built-in quick-cook presets for food preparation made (even) easier.