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## Picture frame antenna sales soar after 'Today' segment

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*Of the Post-Dispatch*

Richard Schneider nearly had forgotten about a picture frame-shaped television antenna he designed when a CNET editor decided to include it on NBC's "Today" show last month.

Now Schneider can't keep up with demand for the product.

The "Today" show mention didn't come by accident. Schneider, the president of Antennas Direct of Eureka, had his publicist contact a CNET editor, Rich DeMuro, after he earlier saw a segment on "Today" about high-definition televisions earlier. The show implied that home-owners needed cable or satellite service to get high-definition pictures on their TVs. CNET is an online publisher of computer and technology news.

Antennas Direct markets antennas that allow customers to pick up HDTV signals broadcast by local stations. Schneider hires contract engineers to design the antennas and has the devices manufactured in Taiwan. He sells them by phone and through his website as well as through electronics dealers.

DeMuro, who does a regular segment on electronics and gadgets on "Today," said that when Antennas Direct contacted him, he wasn't interested in showing large, roof-mounted antennas. When he saw picture-frame antennas listed among the company's products, he asked Schneider to send one to him to test for a "Today" segment on gadget gifts for guys.

Schneider was reluctant. In fact, he had almost decided to discontinue the frame antenna, which was made of plastic and Plexiglas. The antenna is disguised in the backing for the picture.

"The aesthetic (of the frame antenna) never caught me," Schneider said. "I tried to steer (DeMuro) away from it."

But DeMuro insisted, and Schneider decided he needed to fit the antenna into a better-looking wood frame. He bought one at a frame shop, then worked with his manufacturer in Taiwan to find frames they could use to make the antenna. The frames hold an 8-by-10 photograph or other picture.

The frame antenna can hang on a wall or sit on top of the television or another piece of furniture. It screws into a standard TV connector, so installation takes only a couple of minutes.

Schneider said he designed it for people with limited space or those without access to a roof or attic. It also works well for a television in a spare bedroom.

DeMuro said he thought the picture frame antenna fit well with a trend among electronics manufacturers to offer custom colors and styles in HDTVs that hang on walls, as well as gear built into occasional furniture.

DeMuro said he tried the antenna at home before putting it on "Today," and it worked well. Then I took it to the office and it worked great."

He tested it on both HDTV as well as regular off-air broadcasts.

During the "Today" segment, which also featured the new Playstation 3 and Nintendo Wii, DeMuro referred to the picture-frame antenna as "the coolest thing I've seen." He said it's ideal for a bedroom or kitchen, where there may not be room for a cable or satellite receiver.



*Richard Schneider is the driving force behind Antennas Direct.  
(Kevin Manning/P-D)*

Schneider said he sold 300 antennas in the first few hours after the show aired, selling out his stock of 500 shortly thereafter. An order of 3,000 is due Jan. 15, and he has additional frame antennas scheduled to arrive every two weeks through March. The cherry-wood-frame antenna sells for \$39.

The picture-frame antenna also seems to appeal to women. Typically, Schneider said, 90 percent of his customers are male. But on Dec. 8, the day of the "Today" segment, about three quarters of the callers were female.

This month, Target is adding the antenna to its website, and several other websites also offer it, Schneider said.

Lee Goehring, a senior merchant at Target, said the frame antenna fit with Target's desire to offer "the latest and greatest cool gadgets" on its site.

Schneider said sales of his HD antennas have really taken off in the last year. He expects his sales for 2006 would be nearly double his 2005 sales of \$800,000.

He had to move the business out of his home in Wildwood, and he recently increased the size of his office in Eureka.

"We're growing like a weed," Schneider said.