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Planning for A Future-Proof AV Installation

Installing A Home Theatre

Open System Architecture—Planning for a Future-Proof A/V Installation

Five Things To Keep In Mind When Upgrading Your Conference Room

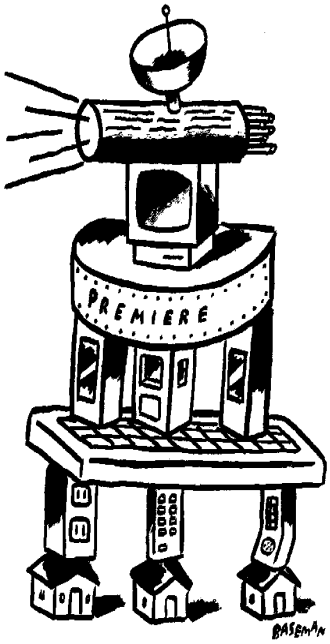
Building a brand-new conference room can be an exciting and rewarding challenge—as long as you feel confident about the room's ability to keep up with rapidly changing technology.

Here's a step-by-step guide to the five most important facets of a state-of-the-art facility; one that can be designed to grow with your clients' companies and with advancing technology.

The five things to consider are:

- Digital display
- Interfacing: the role of the Black Box
- Computers and laptops
- LAN/WAN and Broadband
- Digital Surround Sound and Digital Audio

Digital Display: Projection or Direct View



Digital Display is first on the list for a few reasons. Corporate communications has embraced the display device as the centerpiece of multimedia. Whether it's concealed or the most visible part of a boardroom, digital display makes the most sense when using a computer to conduct presentations.

Today's visual presentations have higher resolution, crispness, color and more graphics than ever before. Digital Display gives the presenter greater flexibility in resolution and illustration to get their point across, so much so that digital projectors have even begun to replace film projection in motion picture theaters and screening rooms. Overall, digital display is better looking, more versatile and less expensive than anything previously available.

The first step is to understand the difference between digital projection and direct view, and to determine which satisfies the clients' needs—or if both displays are called for.

The next step is to consider your projection requirements. Do you need front or rear projection? If direct view is called for, what size? How should your projectors be mounted—fixed or on hidden, moveable lifts?

Digital displays have large ranges in both size and price. No matter what your budget and size restraints are, there is a digital display that's right for you.

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Interfacing: The Role Of The Black Box

The use of the "Black Box", or media interface unit, is probably the most important consideration in "future-proofing" your boardroom. As multimedia applications continue to develop, the Black Box will be the interface that provides your facility with the ability to upgrade easily and cost-effectively.

The Black Box is as a "go-between" between the technology being brought into the room and the room's audiovisual system. For example, you need to accommodate presenters who will bring their presentations on their laptops. This equipment plays an important role in the ergonomics of the room as well.

Another important interface is called the "scaler". This component resides in the equipment rack and is able to translate ("scale") the many new and different laptop display signals to the appropriate resolution of your digital display. The scaler takes many forms and shapes, but is becoming increasingly more important as newer laptops are being designed, not all of which conform to the display standards established by the computer industry.

Computers and Laptops

Anyone who has ever been present in a meeting where the laptop simply isn't displaying correctly to the screen will understand the tension in a room full of expectant peers. A controlled environment is an important tool in limiting the number of things that can go wrong during a presentation.

The most common problem is that the users don't know how to operate their laptops beyond turning on the computer and navigating through the presentation. The facilities manager is usually called upon for assistance, often without proper training or guidance.

Another issue is that many new laptops with large screen video cards have not been built according to industry "display output" standards as a battery-saving scheme. This has created nightmarish problems when the signal is sent out to external display systems, hence the need for "scalers", as discussed above.

A desktop computer installed into the rack is the best answer, although not always the answer we get to work with. It is ideal to receive the presentation via a network connection, but not always possible.

The bottom line is that your boardroom should allow for multiple types of computers and laptops, and have some "safety nets" built in to prevent both electronic mishaps and mismatches.

Anyone who has ever been in a meeting where the laptop isn't displaying correctly understands how important a controlled environment can be.

LAN/WAN and Broadband

Every modern boardroom needs to have access to the Internet and to the company network. However, there are many ergonomic factors to take into account when installing the LAN/WAN drops in your facility, otherwise the presenter's, and the room's, flexibility can be severely impaired.

Traditional uses for the boardroom such as whiteboards remain primary considerations, but multimedia and corporate communications need to be integrated transparently.

Consideration of where and how many LAN drops are placed is key. Wireless LAN is becoming commonplace now, and is erasing the need to wire LAN to seats in training or lecture hall facilities. As the use of IP as a standard in worldwide communications spurs the advances in boardroom design, videoconference and media rich application sharing will grow profoundly, dictating the use of corporate facilities.

The uses of LAN/WAN and Broadband in the boardroom demonstrate some of the most profound transformations in corporate communications applications, and should be completely thought through in the design phase.

Digital Surround Sound and Digital Audio

Digital Audio is a technical area that has provided numerous powerful resources to the audiovisual tool bag. It is an area that moves from very basic to complex.

Multimedia players and digital networks provide audio paths that are managed and played through traditional and affordable speaker systems. In fact, consumer receivers using sophisticated DSP (Digital Signal Processing) chips are downright inexpensive today.

Technology has greatly simplified the process of wiring high-quality room audio into a good-sized boardroom. It is in the design of larger, more complex facilities that the use of digital audio systems provides powerful tools for equalization and room combining.

Another aspect of digital audio advancement has been in telecommunications, specifically teleconferencing systems. The IP revolution is providing new and exciting capabilities to connect multiple locations, and at lower costs than ever before.

Digital Audio and Video in meeting facilities and boardroom environments present a diverse and powerful tool set for providing specific applications tailored to the client's needs.

Given the substantial monetary investment required to upgrade a conference room, it only makes sense to be prepared for the future.

Virtual Meetings—Planning For The Future

The future holds many fantastic advancements in the ways we will meet in a business setting. If the above considerations are utilized, the modern boardroom will be FutureSmart© in providing transparent integration of upcoming multimedia systems technology.

The true integration of multimedia requires the ability to blend telephones, video cameras, microphones, computers and IP technology into a cohesive whole.

As computers become faster, and software applications take advantage of this speed, our ability to share data, voice and images between remote locations will become an affordable reality.

Healthcare, education, and hospitality/ business presentation markets will be particularly affected. Facilities being designed and built today should have an upgrade pathway planned ahead of time.

Given the substantial monetary investment required to upgrade a conference room, it only makes sense to be prepared for future media.

About Sunset Studios

Sunset Studios has been a valuable team player and asset to many projects, working with some of the most distinguished architectural and design firms in the world. We do both Design/ Consult and Design/Build projects, and we have been responsible for some of the most elegant state-of-the art facilities in the Los Angeles area, including the Warner Brothers Television Multimedia Focus Room and the Bacara Resort & Spa in Santa Barbara.

For more information, or call us at 310-277-0901. We look forward to talking to you about how we can help translate your clients' dreams into 21st century reality.

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