TOP AV TECH

THAT WILL SAVE TIME & MONEY FOR YOUR BUSINESS

As the use of audiovisual communications and videoconferencing continues to increase in the workplace, the success of a company is increasingly dependent on the scalability of the solutions that enable successful delivery of content.

Workforces are spreading out across regional outposts and home offices, and the distance and multitude of locations across which business must communicate is expanding. Real time collaboration, meetings, training, and company communications all depend on getting the message out, often across many platforms at the same time, requiring that some companies implement a level of technology previously found in Fortune 500 companies or TV broadcast studios. But not every company is operating at that scale, and fortunately there are a number of levels at which small to medium sized businesses can implement audiovisual technology to support growing communications needs.

Evaluating what an individual company needs in the face of multiple communications technology changes can make it challenging to decide where to begin with upgrades. There is a common thread to the evolution, though, and that thread makes it possible to narrow down the improvements to areas that will have the most impact. Online tools and networking platforms are unifying business communications, and to get the most return on

investment with these tools, there are three areas in which to capitalize: AV over IP upgrades, huddle rooms, and web streaming. Here's a look at how each of these AV and IT solutions can improve your bottom line.

AV Over IP Upgrades

Compared to the ease of upgrading many other modern technology devices, the experience of modifying AV systems produces unique challenges. When so much can be done at the touch of a button in a browser window or through a mobile app, it can be frustrating to realize that AV equipment requires its own specialized connections, cabling, distribution, and control systems making expansion difficult and expensive.

New innovations in AV technology are eliminating those frustrations by adopting the efficiency and robustness of IT technologies. Where audiovisual upgrades once required dedicated cable pulls for VGA or HDMI and the acquisition of proprietary AV distribution equipment and control systems, the latest system designs feature flexible AV over IP solutions that can reduce equipment costs by utilizing existing infrastructure.

NO MORE HDMI?

HDMI introduced a standard protocol for carrying video, audio, and control between AV devices. While it made connecting devices at home easier, in an office setting, it was still another cable that needed to be run and required control devices for distribution.

1. HDMI CABLES ARE EXPENSIVE

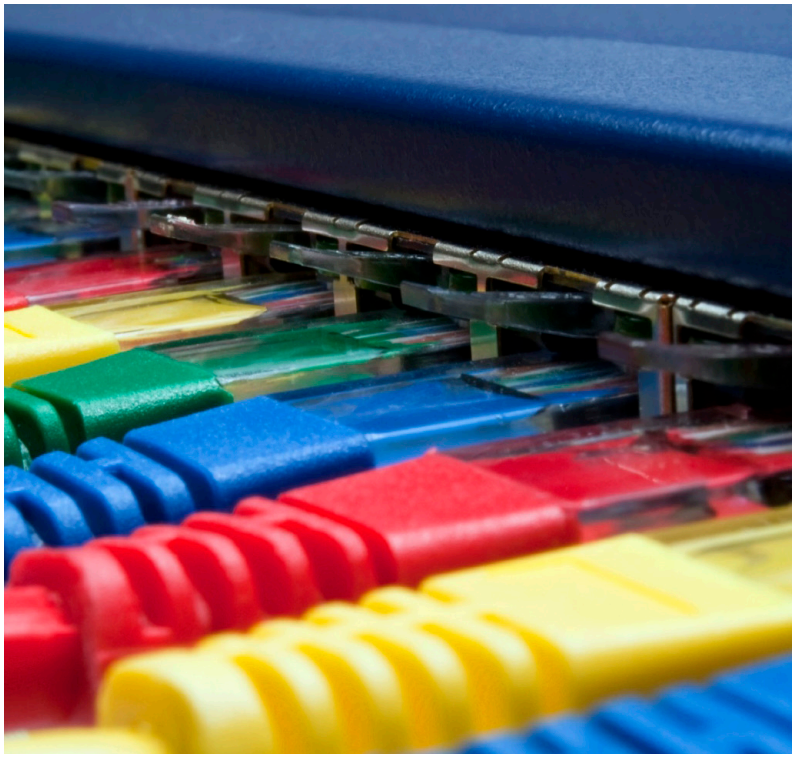
HDMI cabling is an expensive and bulky way to connect AV devices. The cost per foot is typically 300% more than network cables and is more difficult to install.

2. NO CONTROL DEVICES

Moving AV signals from HDMI to IP eliminates the cost of separate control devices for HDMI distribution.

3. WORKS ON EXISTING NETWORK

In most cases, AV over IP solutions will work on your existing IP network and eliminate the cost of running separate AV cables.



Improved efficiency begins with the cabling. A single Cat5e/6 cable can carry dozens of video, audio, and control signal paths. Further, by setting up an AV system on an IT network, it's possible to implement IP-based signal distribution for delivering audio and video sources to output devices. Then the entire networked system can be controlled via a standard web-based interface. An AV designer can create a custom GUI for use on a web browser, tablet, or mobile device.

Once integrated onto an IT network, AV systems feature the scalability and flexibility required to grow and change with evolving user needs and room environments. Future upgrades will be more in line with what the IT department is used to rolling out, compared to the more disruptive construction work that would have been required when new AV-specific cable was pulled in the past.

Less downtime is an added benefit of an AV over IP system, which can be centrally managed for optimum performance and ease of operation. Networked control of systems means that changes can be made remotely, so user queries can be addressed swiftly from anywhere. A projector or video display can be powered on, projection screens lowered, and audio systems checked or adjusted, all via SNMP. Each piece of AV hardware on the

network can be accessed to discover what is occurring operationally, or what changes need to be made to resume use. Even the classic question, "Is it plugged in?" can be addressed through remote power status verification.

The networked management of rooms and audio-visual equipment increases efficiency and reduces costs—not to mention lowering the likelihood that IT personnel will have to drop everything and travel physically to a room to make adjustments. Additionally, these tasks can be performed within the applications preferred or developed by operators on-site. Where formerly a proprietary solution would require a separate control interface, now operation of all AV equipment on the network can be merged into one control window.

What is the ROI?

When so many AV systems must be monitored across buildings and campuses, with more rooms coming online all the time, the flexibility and scalability of AV over IP systems is a real boon to business. But the ability to manage that equipment from one centralized location brings even more long-term ROI as operations costs are reduced and room use is maximized. Less downtime, more remote capabilities, and plenty of scalability and user customization options are moving AV user experiences closer to the true efficiencies of networked technologies.

Adding Huddle Rooms

Today's workplace is more flexible than ever, with web-based videoconferencing and streaming options enabling efficient collaboration between local and remote team members. Busy travel schedules and expansion to new office locations are easily accommodated by web meeting tools that help make it feel like everyone is in the same room at the same time.

Expansion and adoption of these new tools has been rapid, and many companies are finding it challenging to outfit offices with enough spaces to allow as many team members as possible to communicate in these new ways. Demand for high-tech rooms is up at a time when real estate is at a premium, which has caused the evolution of a new style of meeting space.

New huddle rooms have joined the roster of available options for employees looking to gather quickly and share a screen and/or communicate via videoconferencing. Tending to be smaller in size, or simply cordoned off in disused sections of floor plans, huddle spaces reflect the efficiency of new meeting styles. They are typically outfitted simply, with a few chairs around a small table, a large flat-screen display, a video camera, and a microphone and speaker system for clear communication.

Given the number of free or economically priced communications tools available online, it might be tempting to rely on laptop cameras or a basic web cam and screen setup to outfit a huddle room.

Unfortunately, that leads to the wrong kind of huddle—one where multiple meeting participants are huddling around a tiny camera and default laptop microphone and speakers.

Operating as the physical extension of business, web-based videoconferencing and huddle rooms are equally dependent on quality hardware solutions to optimize the benefits of these tools. Careful selection of the right cameras, audio equipment, and an easy-to-use control system will prevent distractions caused by bad video and audio quality, or confusion in meeting-room setup. A well designed huddle room that includes technologies optimized for the space will help a company create the right impression both in the room and with clients and prospects.

To ensure that huddle rooms enhance productivity and boost a company's image, invest in purpose-built meeting room technologies. Even in a small space, a noticeable image difference is provided by a specialized HD camera with a lens built to capture every participant in the room. Similarly, a properly placed microphone system built to capture voices from around the room will reduce listener strain on the far end. In-room loudspeakers, too, will help to provide clear communication.

TIME TO HUDDLE?

Converting office space to huddle rooms with Web-based video conferencing has its advantages.

1. SAVE TRAVEL COSTS

For a typical small-to-medium enterprise, if business travel can be reduced by half with videoconferencing, savings in lost productivity alone are over $31,000 per year. (Herman Miller)

2. THE NEED TO MEET

The ratio of people to meeting space used to be 75 to one; now it's 10 to one and in the future it will be five to one. (Herman Miller.)

3. ROOM TO WORK WITH

65% of videoconferencing is done with room systems according to a study by Wainhouse Research.

Tie all of these technologies together with an audiovisual control system that realizes the easy and efficient instant-meeting setup. Integrated with office software solutions, a huddle room control setup incorporates calendar details to reduce room reservation confusion. The touch interface also provides quick access to video calls and collaboration tools for content sharing.

What is the ROI?

Whether used for connecting remote coworkers or introducing a new client to a team, huddle rooms bring the best return on investment when image, voice, and control options are very clear. Whether a company is using a videoconferencing codec or web-based tools, a huddle room pays for itself with efficiency and productivity enhancement. With reputation-saving audiovisual hardware, ROI comes with the amount of time saved and tasks accomplished in a meeting uninterrupted by technology problems.

Web Streaming

The one-to-many model of web streaming video content is one that can easily be understood in the age of online entertainment sharing services. It's hard to deny the convenience of instant access to video content, sent across all manner of bandwidth conditions to a countless array of devices ranging from mobile phones to large-screen displays. Now the barrier to delivery across platforms has been reduced, and users don't have to think twice about seeing what they want, on-demand.

The appeal of this method of audiovisual transmission is now arriving in the workplace as well. It's particularly effective within organizations seeking new ways to communicate company-wide, simultaneously delivering a message with the enhanced impact and clarity that video provides. Where time sensitivity or mission-critical content is concerned, or when training or operations messages need to be consistent, web streaming and IPTV solutions are offering new ways to distribute video.

As workforces grow and expand to include remote locations and countless work-from-home outposts, unifying corporate communications requires a bit more than calling everyone into the lobby for a town hall announcement. Fortunately, video streaming and IPTV provide an array of options for getting the message out quickly, clearly, and directly.

Delivery of these messages begins with recording or live transmission technologies, and there are many options to assist organizations of all sizes. At the top end, corporations are building video production studios complete with stage setups like those found in television broadcast facilities. Then there are a multitude of mid-level and desktop options that make it possible to record video messages and training courses with interactive components.

Once the message is produced, there are an equally diverse array of methods by which to distribute it. Today's streaming technology enables an advanced level of delivery, where content is bundled up for transmission and then sent across a network for reception on a wide array of devices connected at a range of bandwidths.

That way, a sales executive viewing an announcement via mobile device receives the same seamless presentation as colleagues who have gathered in a boardroom.

As an added benefit to all this efficiency, implementation of streaming technology is simplified by an ability to use existing network infrastructure. There's no need to install new coax cable or dedicated HDMI cables to deliver content to users, networked streaming and IPTV technologies are inherently designed to send video over any network to any device.

What is the ROI?

The cost savings associated with live streaming are numerous, including a reduction in travel costs for those who would previously have to attend meetings or training sessions in person. Other benefits encompass increased staff engagement and improved efficiency. The right technology choices, however, are also essential to increase ROI. A well designed video streaming solution will provide reliable ease of use, ensuring that it is used frequently and to great effect. Further, a properly configured system can help assure compliance and consistency in content.

ONLINE TRAINING

One critical benefit of Web Streaming solutions are the ability to host secure HR and employee training videos on servers that are accessible by employees across the country.

1. HALF THE COST

Video cuts nearly half the cost of training. (IBM) Before video, 40% of training expenditures came from travel and lodging costs alone.

2. 50% MORE SALES

On-demand learning yields 50% higher net sales per employee. (ASTD.) Video provides the technology for continuous training. Sales reps are able to pull up lessons on their tablets or laptops at their convenience—so they get answers right when they need them.

Next Steps

Just as architects and interior design specialists work together to create a harmonious atmosphere conducive to work, a professional AV systems integrator translates communications needs into a ready-to-use solution that boosts productivity. And as with every design specialty, AV integration involves advanced skill in the setup and implementation of an end-result that delivers on user expectations. By considering all the technological elements that could make or break a system on the backend, AV integrators deliver a polished presentation and positive meeting experience on the front end.

A meeting room system or video communications setup will yield far better results if it's reliable and easy to use, and the likelihood for that result can be increased if a system is tailor-made for a specific workplace. To achieve this result, an audiovisual integration specialist will conduct a needs analysis and present ideas for a solution.

Professional AV integrators will also present the opportunity for a demonstration of the latest AV technology. Seeing how a system works in a comparable reference application, either in another corporate setting or in the integrator's facilities will aid in the decision-making process. Further along in the design process, a proof of concept may also be executed, with an integrator implementing a system for temporary use within a client's facility. This leads to greater clarity on how a system will be used, and what features will enable optimal use.

As communication technologies become more and more accessible, their use starts to become second-nature in the workplace. Adoption of new networked technologies is streamlining overall implementation, but complexities remain in their optimization. There to navigate these nuances through the filter of a company's individual needs, an audiovisual integrator can make sure the technology goes to work for you.

About Alpha Video & Audio, Inc.

Alpha Video is a national integrator of audiovisual and broadcast technologies that empower organizations to better communicate with their target audience. We design, integrate, and support solutions that improve visual communications, collaboration, and content creation.

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