



7 Things To Know Before Starting Your Next AV Project

Some helpful thoughts before you start digging in...

1. Infrastructure Matters

Wire and conduit are like tires on a car. They are not fun to buy but you're not going anywhere without them. When beginning an AV project, creating a solid infrastructure will go a very long way in saving money as technologies become more accessible. Often, the largest expense in an upgrade installation is not the equipment, but the expense of opening up walls, ceilings and floors to get new updated cabling in place. When planning the AV systems in a new project, plan to install power and conduits to the wall plates where you expect equipment to be installed, even if you are not installing that portion of the AV system now. These items are a much smaller expense when bought during construction rather than after construction has been completed. Another good idea is to have the electrician install an extra conduit between your FOH area and the stage. Conduits get filled up quickly and updated cabling will someday need to be run. Be the informed advocate who insists that the infrastructure gives you room to grow. That strategy will come back around someday and save your organization time and money.

2. Acoustics

The acoustics in any space have a great deal of influence on the sound coming from the audio system. The best (and most expensive) system will not perform at its peak without the acoustics in the room being optimized. The most cost effective time to properly address acoustics is early on in the construction process before any walls or ceilings have been built. So engaging an experienced acoustic designer early is a good thing to do. However, if you have an existing facility that has a problem or two, know that many acoustic issues can be resolved after construction as well. Materials used to augment an existing space do not need to be expensive and can make a world of difference in controlling the sound in your space.

3. Budget



A necessary but not so fun topic... A budget by definition is not unlimited and will inevitably drive the direction of any design-build project. Working out a budget in the infancy of a project is key as it will define how and where compromises are made. An experienced AV designer is able to value engineer a proposal to get you as many of the features you most desire, in the most economical system available. High priorities can be placed on specific items like infrastructure, sound quality and image quality, as these systems will be in place for a long time and require a larger effort to upgrade. Other items like cameras, microphones or even mixing consoles

are easily upgraded in future system improvements. A reputable company will work with you through the choices and the compromises, to get you what you need for the best value possible.

4. Equipment

The most exciting part of getting a new AV system is the new equipment that will be purchased, and it will most likely need to last a long while. A few points to make sure of prior to your purchase:

- Equipment has a documented history of reliability and service.
- Equipment manufacturer provides a good warranty.
- The end users will have the ability to effectively use the new features of the system after training.

Also, consider seeking the contribution of your people. The end users, IT and others involved with the system's daily use, will likely have different perspectives on what to purchase. It is a good policy to have all those that will be involved feel like their opinion was heard. Every opinion will not necessarily change what is ultimately purchased, but it will help dramatically in getting buy in from your people after the new system is installed.

5. System Tuning

Tuning is the final touch on any system that makes it extraordinary. The acoustics have influence on the sound, the electronics have their signature, the musicians have needs, the engineer has preferences

and the audience must have an experience that is memorable. Tuning is using the human element to merge all of these things together to be repeatable and is key to bringing out the value of your investment. The goal in tuning an audio system is to allow what you are sending out of a mixer to be reflected properly in what you hear. This is done by qualified personnel that have been trained in both audio engineering as well as acoustics. Tuning should always be done with a system analyzer such as the Meyer SIM 3. This tool allows the technician to truly measure the sound from each independent source then craft the EQ, crossover, and delays to bring the system into alignment. This is a time intensive process and large systems can sometimes take several days depending on the complexity of the system. The data gathered is then put into the DSP processor that is part of the sound system. This is best because once it is complete, the settings on the mixing console cannot change the tuning of the room. The engineer can then use the console to color the room as they see fit for the performance.

6. Training



Training is something to be considered even before the system is purchased for many reasons. How experienced are your end users? What are the system functions that the end users must walk away being able to use? How much training will be needed for the system you are planning to build? Systems can be designed to be versatile but with each feature comes the need to know how to use it. A system that is designed to be configured for many different events will require more knowledge to make changes quickly and efficiently. A system that is fully automated and is normally used for similar functions every day will require less training. Training also needs to be able to advance the knowledge of both the experienced end user as well as the novice. The

experienced users will typically want to learn more advanced concepts and functions where the novice might need help with some conceptual components of the AV system in general. Finally, recording the professional training provided is something we highly recommend. You almost certainly will have staff turnover. The ability to review training will help when you bring in future employees and volunteers and it is good to have for future review. Training from a high-end professional company will motivate, educate and develop the skill set of your people. Considering the training options provided prior to purchase is a good idea.

7. Quality Service

Post installation service seems far off, but knowing the future maintenance needs of a system is an important item to consider prior to purchase. A good example is a projector. The newer laser projectors are higher quality and more expensive initially. However, the less expensive lamp type projectors will require the lamps to be replaced periodically. Lamps can be costly and so is the labor cost to replace them. Maintaining an AV system will need to be done by qualified personnel who have extensive knowledge of system components and how they work. The AV contractor that you are engaging should be able to service the installation you are purchasing. Maintenance Agreements are a good way to keep your system functioning, clean and ready to go. Service Agreements are a good way to reduce the cost of service over time. Things break, it happens. However, having the forethought to budget funds for these issues at the beginning of a project is a way to set yourself apart as a good systems manager.