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EDITORIAL

AV + IT Should Be Top of Mind When Planning a Meeting Space Reno

Hospitality's premier AV/Acoustics consulting group says a renovation is the perfect time to improve the technology infrastructure of event space

By Jeff Loether

Hotels and conference centers undergoing make-overs or full-scale renovations of their meeting space should seriously consider a simultaneous event-technology overhaul. Not only is it the best way to economically accommodate the technology needs of planners, but with walls and ceilings exposed, audiovisual and telecommunications conduit, cabling, connectivity, show power and lighting controls can conveniently be upgraded.

It will never cost less or be easier to upgrade your event technologies than during the renovation phase. Technology can only go so far to compensate for poor room acoustics, poor lighting and unfriendly wall finishes. It's far better and less expensive to improve the interior architecture than trying to mask the symptoms.

Here are 5 Tips When Conducting a Meeting Space Renovation:

1. **Improve Infrastructure Cabling:** If you offer show power, telecom and Internet services, cabling, connectivity, rigging and hanging points in the event space, providing four-packs or six-packs of STP (Shielded Twisted Pair) cabling tie lines is a must. Today's digital audio/video extenders require shielded cabling for best performance over distance, and the STP cable is still useful for temporary network use. Make sure the tie-line upgrades also include multi-mode fiber for larger rooms. The STP and fiber cables should be brought back to the AV room and landed at patch panels so any connector can be re-purposed for any service in any room at any time. This is a very cost-effective and flexible approach.

2. **Provide Wired HSIA:** In addition to the ubiquitous WiFi, all function space must provide a wired high-speed Internet service. Any presentation or meeting function that is Internet based must be wired; do NOT rely on wireless. It's important to note that many corporate clients and government agencies will not conduct meetings in a wireless environment.
3. **Telephone Services are a Must:** The cabling infrastructure of any event space must provide telephone services as well. These are used both for audio teleconferencing and for the audio part of video teleconferences. Keep in mind that, while IP-based conferencing is used most often today, many companies (pharmaceuticals, government agencies and contractors, etc.) still require the security of switched networks to access their corporate LANs and legacy VTC equipment and require dial-up switched services including ISDN and T1 lines. Due to these security concerns, this will be the case for the foreseeable future.
4. **Add a High-Quality Sound System:** All meetings need voice reinforcement, and there is no better way to provide high intelligibility in the typical flexible function space than to start with a high-quality sound system that is based on an array of ceiling speakers. Start with sound and build from there.
5. **Lower Background Noise/Interference:** No matter the type of event – live or teleconference – good acoustics are key to success. When walls and ceilings have been stripped to the studs, do whatever you can to lower background noise, including addressing rattling HVAC air handlers and installing diffusers and vibration isolators to prevent reverberation. When walls and ceilings go back up, consider the finishes being used. Acoustically-absorptive wall finishes, such as fabric-wrapped panels, can be added for as little as \$4 a square foot, and Acoustical Ceiling Tiles absorb sound that strikes the tile which reduces overall sound levels in the room.

When investing in any event space renovation, hoteliers must ensure that the designs meet or exceed the standards of today's most discerning planners. No amount of technology can make up for a bad environment. Before embarking on any renovation project, a crucial first step for hotel companies, developers, asset managers, architects, interior designers, construction managers and contractors is to seek the consultation of an AudioVisual and Acoustical Services expert. Only then can you be sure that the technology you use compliments the new environment you just created.

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About Jeff Loether

Jeff Loether is president and founder of ELECTRO-MEDIA DESIGN, Ltd., an AudioVisual systems design and Acoustical consultation group with expertise in audio, video, control, and related presentation, entertainment, and communications technologies. The practice also includes AudioVisual Operational and Management consulting to address the entire AV systems lifecycle. As independent consultants over the last 25 years, EMD has provided consulting services for more than 800 projects globally, including: hotels, conference and convention centers, spas and resorts, government facilities, corporate board rooms, theaters and auditoria, schools and electronic classrooms, training and meeting rooms, courtrooms, places of worship, restaurants and nightclubs, sports facilities and venues, and command and control centers.