

## **State of the Art Technical Improvements**

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## Abstract

The Saginaw Valley State University Conference and Event Center (UCEC) recently implemented a Best Practice, the automation of audio/visual equipment. UCEC had been faced with the difficult task of providing quality service to our clients with equipment that was outdated, difficult to use and labor-intensive.

The conference center facilities underwent an extensive renovation in 2005, nearly ten years after the center was built. The main purpose was to update our facility to keep with the understated elegance of a premier conference facility. The renovation also presented a timely opportunity to address the audio/visual shortcomings, and \$100,000 was invested in new equipment. We anticipate a three year payback, while the average lifespan of the equipment is 10 years.

## Introduction of the Organization

The University Conference and Events Center is a full service conference facility, offering catering, box office and registration services, among other things, including a full range of multi-media and audio-visual support. We host University constituencies and groups from the surrounding community ranging from 10 guests to 1,000 people, and events that run the gamut from music recitals and small seminars to full banquets and large public presentations.

## Statement of the Problem

The Conference and Events Center was faced with the problem of having outdated audio visual equipment that was very labor-intensive to set up and use. We did not have the ability to deliver the premium services our clients increasingly requested. In fiscal year 2006, UCEC hosted over 4,000 events, some 78 percent of which required some form of audio/visual equipment. We made do with outdated and portable equipment, often using devices in manners other than intended, such as placing a portable projector in the middle of a concert hall. As you might expect, this produced less than ideal results.

This problem is very common in other conference centers, both collegiate and in private industry. Many properties have limited or no technology. Many fellow higher education institutions have outdated facilities that were originally intended for academic use and later converted to a conference center. We contacted several institutions regarding our proposal and none of them had undergone nor anticipated a renovation such as we envisioned.

## Design

The new system was designed to be more efficient, less labor intensive, and more aesthetically pleasing. We examined the possibility of installing permanent audio/visual equipment. The plan was comprised of Best Practices to be adopted in areas of audio/visual equipment; data projection systems, projection screens, DVD players, various wired and wireless microphones, network connections and amplifiers.

In the past, an employee would have to manually transport a portable screen weighing over 30 pounds and set it up in the conference room for each event. That task alone took over 45 minutes each time. By investing in new equipment, we would update our audio visual technology, improve our processes and establish an equipment deferment plan that would help us better forecast our capital equipment purchases in the future. The deferment plan encompassed five and ten year projections on the life expectancy of the equipment and the financial ramifications. The plan was reviewed and supported by Vice President for Administrative and Business Affairs.

## Implementation

The event planners, audio visual technicians and the contractors met and developed a list of equipment that was outdated and developed a list of items that needed to be replaced. We contracted with a company that specialized in audio visual equipment.

The original design and equipment was changed several times. Throughout the process we discovered items being specified for the project that were unnecessary. For example, a projector was going to be installed in a 5,200

square foot meeting facility was the same model ordered for meeting spaces measuring 1,300 square feet. Once appropriate projectors were identified for the specifications of the meeting rooms, the result was a cost savings of over \$9,000.

### Benefits

The improvements as described resulted in a \$42,000 labor savings in the first year. At the same time, we saw a 57 percent increase in audio/visual requests. In order to respond to this demand, we streamlined our processes by automating the audio/visual equipment.

By implementing this Best Practice, another benefit we found was improved customer satisfaction<sup>1</sup> that resulted from the increased flexibility created by the automation, allowing us to increase efficiency. We have demonstrated success in meeting our clients' demands in a more professional and modern manner, and without additional personnel. We have received numerous favorable comments on our "state-of-the-art technology" and have attracted several new, large clients to our facility, including The Dow Chemical Company, a Fortune 50 Corporation.

### Retrospect

Though it is too soon for a through review and early returns are promising, there are some things that could have been done differently, in hindsight. I believe we would have benefited by having other audio/visual designers involved with our primary media contractor. Once the equipment was installed some items did not function exactly as expected. This equipment was redesigned to function in a manner that was acceptable to us.

<sup>1</sup> per client satisfaction survey, 4 percent increase in events and new Fortune 50 Clientele