



plified controls are normally used 20 to 30 hours per week or more. A control system adds significantly to the cost of a project, but the return on investment can improve by a factor of 10 or more.

WHO TO INVOLVE ON YOUR PLANNING TEAM

In evaluating whether a control system is worth the investment, we have found that there are five major areas of concern that you or your AV integrator must address:

CONTROLLING INTERESTS

FIVE TIPS TO MAXIMIZING CONTROL SYSTEM BENEFITS AT YOUR FACILITY

by John Laughlin

A well-designed control system adds simplicity, consistency, reliability and efficiency to sophisticated presentation and communication systems.

Suppose someone on your staff wants to initiate a video conference with your Dallas office. Does he or she have to know how to turn on the large screen displays, turn on the videoconferencing codec, adjust the lights, zoom in the camera, switch the input on the sound system, adjust the microphones, choose the correct equalizer settings and dial Dallas? Or does he or she simply push a button labeled "Dallas"?

Our experience is that difficult-to-operate AV systems are not used very often—five to 10 hours per month is typical. Yet well-designed systems with sim-

for support and service from a web browser. Your IT manager will want to be sure there are no security holes that might compromise the network.

For larger AV and video conferencing systems, digital signage networks and any system carrying high definition consumer media (such as news, entertainment or Blu-ray), you'll want to consider an all-digital Internet Protocol (IP) signal path. At this point bandwidth becomes a major concern. It's important to use an AV integrator who understands network requirements and can work with your IT manager to separate audio/ video traffic from data traffic, via either a VLAN or separate networks.

Your IT staff can also be your best resource for AV user support, and if they take on that role, your

1 IT Concerns

Your control system will probably run on an existing IP network, so your IT manager should have input into its design. Newer processors from Crestron, Extron, and AMX all connect to control panels and other components via the network, and they can be set up



Big Ideas

IT manager should be involved in plans for technical staff training; for helpdesk tools that allow technicians to see and operate room controls from networked PCs; and in any decisions on service and maintenance contracts.

2 Facility Management Concerns

Today's AV control systems offer several opportunities for environmental system control that your facilities manager will want to be involved in.

On the most basic level, your AV controls should tie into your lighting system, so that lights adjust easily or automatically as needed. It's also possible to use AV control processors for various "green" initiatives—such as turning AV and lighting on and off automatically, integrating lights and shading into daylight harvesting systems, and including thermostat controls into room scheduling—providing significant energy savings and improving your return on investment.

3 Security Department Concerns

If theft is a risk in your facility, your security manager should know that equipment monitoring is an easy addition to networked AV control systems.

Should someone disconnect a piece of equipment, the system can notify security instantly and trigger cameras to record the theft. With the addition of radio frequency ID tags, the system can track stolen equipment as it moves through your building, aiding apprehension efforts.

4 Administrative Concerns

5 User Concerns

You can buy the hardware from almost anyone—and most integrators have the engineering and programming skills to make your system function. But you need someone who is skilled in listening and analysis.

John Laughlin, CTS, is President and CEO of Conference Technologies, Inc., a provider of audio visual design, integration, video conferencing, rental solutions, and technical service support, with nine offices throughout the United States. For the full list of ways to optimize your control system, read his column on avtechnologyonline.com.

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Control4 is now servicing commercial properties with its IP-based, mesh network control systems. For more info, go to avtechnologyonline.com/act10.

