



Digital upgrade helps bring the Space Needle into the 21st Century

It's hard to believe, but Seattle's Space Needle, an icon of America's technological leadership, will turn 50 in 2012.

Amazingly, the privately-held attraction, which pulls in more than 130,000 visitors per month, does not seem dated. That's no doubt due to its owners' willingness to invest in upgrades. Among those was the remodeling of its meeting and banquet facilities recently, including the addition of an all-digital audio/video system based on Crestron DigitalMedia™.

According to Eric Rommen, Banquet Coordinator, the tower's Skyline Meeting Center has long been popular with local biomed, not-for-profit and technology companies, including Microsoft and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. But it had become increasingly obvious that, in order to keep that business, the facility needed an upgrade.

Today the Skyline Center offers clients high-definition projectors installed in each meeting room, a new room-combining sound and video distribution system and Crestron control. Sources include Blu-ray Disc® players, DirectTV®, a 14-channel Muzak® service, inputs for digital and analog laptops, iPod® docks and video games.

The Skyline Center has three rooms that can be used as either one or two meeting areas, Rommen says. The facility hosts 30 to 50 events each month, ranging from corporate directors' meetings to training sessions, weddings and holiday parties.

With the availability of the high-end systems, Rommen says he can offer his clients a value rarely found in a hotel or conference center. "We have one client who always brought in his own projector. I told him to give our system a try. He plugged in, saw the quality we were able to offer and said, 'this is amazing.'"

Planning the system

After a year managing the Skyline Center, Rommen believed there was an opportunity to increase business by providing better meeting technology.

The owners agreed and began planning the upgrade in late 2010. Tyson Scherb at Seattle-based, Commercial Sound & Video recommended an all-digital system using HD projectors, sound processing, Crestron DigitalMedia components, including a 16X16 matrix switcher, and Crestron control.

"DigitalMedia is the best game in town as far as video processing is concerned," Scherb explains. "In addition to that, it's an easy system to set up, which allowed us to offer a more competitive installation price."



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“I told the integrators what we needed,” Rommen adds, “including the ability to handle digital and analog sources, better sound, and easier operation. Commercial Sound seemed to have the best solution and the best service. I had also worked with Crestron in the past and knew they offered stable and proven technology.”

A unique space

The Skyline Center is arranged in a triangular pattern just below the Space Needle’s observation and restaurant decks, offering spectacular views. There are three meeting rooms, and the largest room can be divided into smaller meeting rooms.

That fact makes the quality of the sound and video especially important, since a presenter speaking in the Puget Sound Room, for example, can only be seen and heard in the Lake Union and Seattle Rooms from the audio/video systems. Rommen keeps a portable high-definition camera on hand at all times, plugging it into the system to show a presenter’s image on the projection screens and to record meetings.

Each space also includes a wireless Crestron touch screen and wall-mount docking station. While available for use by the customer, Rommen says he or another staff member normally operate the audio/video system as part of their high-service approach. “It’s easy enough for our clients to use the touch screen, but generally we take care of it for them so they can focus on their meetings.” Because the systems are network-

based, only one person is required to support the entire facility. “If someone calls from another room and says, ‘Can you help us switch an input?’ I can do that remotely.”

One challenge that the old audio/video system never overcame was the building’s steel structure. “We would host auctions, either silent or live, and always had problems with the wireless mics. Commercial Sound installed several more access points for the microphones, so you can move around the entire space now and not cut out. It’s really nice and smooth.” The equipment rack now includes five wireless mic receivers, and staff can easily assign mics, as needed, to each room using either of the Crestron touch screens.

After a year of daily use, Rommen says his managers and customers are very happy with the upgrade.

“We love the new systems. My regular clients are confident that we have an audio/video system that works and features the best technology out there today. We know, too, that we’re ready for whatever the future brings.”

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