

Award-winning
conference
room takes
media to
an extreme



Best Presentation Rooms
Grand Prize
Boardroom
Competition 2000



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Boardroom at National Association of Realtors wins Best Presentations Rooms grand prize

Media taken to the extreme: DVD, web, streaming, videotape, PowerPoint, and MacroMedia. Each on a single projection screen or on side-by-side plasma displays.



All supported by an audio system powerful enough to require 6" of sound-proofing in the room's walls. These are all standard fare in a new boardroom at the National Association of Realtors (NAR), which was chosen by *Presentations* and *Training* magazines as its grand prize conference room in the 2000 *Best Presentation Room Competition*.

Despite its quiet-sounding name, NAR is anything but a quiet organization. It is, in fact, the world's largest trade association, with 54 state and district organizations, 1,700 local chapters and over 730,000 members. Headquarters prepares hundreds of presentations each year for member meetings, educational programs and conventions, and it's critical that NAR's executive

management keep in touch with its far-reaching membership. So when they began planning a new boardroom for their headquarters in downtown Chicago, they knew it would be built around an extensive media system.

Powerful presentations

The a/v system NAR built with the help of Chicago's United Visual, Inc. is both practical and impressive. As you enter the boardroom, the first thing you notice is a beautiful burled-walnut table and matching credenza. The table has a raised center section, and if you look closely, you'll notice 18 microphones unobtrusively mounted and nine small doors, each of which hides power and network connections for laptops and an





Opposite page: NAR boardroom with plasma displays in use, for videoconferencing (top) and for side-by-side computer images.

This page: the LCD projector in use (top); closeup of connectors in table with laptop plugged in.

input for an AMX touchscreen. Push a button on this control and a high-brightness Panasonic projector drops from the ceiling, while simultaneously a screen lowers, the lights dim and black-out shades cover the windows. Push another button, the projection system disappears and the credenza top begins to rise, revealing two Sony plasma monitors ready to show side-by-side computer or video images.

Hank Welch, Director of Technical Customer Service at NAR, says that the association needs side-by-side images because staff do a lot of comparisons during presentations. For instance, a presenter might contrast proposed changes on the Realtor website with what is currently there—or may show a PowerPoint about the site while

simultaneously showing material from the site. On the other hand, when it's time to do a single-screen presentation to a client or board member, the larger LCD image can have more impact.

Because users of the conference room are typically high-level managers, board members or guests, technology in the room is geared as much to meeting participants as to presenters. For instance, the conference table includes AC power, network and media connections for participants' laptops, making it easy for them to connect to the internet or even make a presentation from any seat at the table. United also installed a SoftBoard interactive whiteboard to make it easy to capture written notes from discussions and brainstorming sessions.

Videoconferencing

Communicating effectively throughout the organization was another important goal for the new boardroom. Though you don't see it, a PictureTel Concorde is a critical component. Its camera—the only component visible—nestles between the plasma displays. Push a button on the AMX touchscreen to raise the plasmas and camera, power the Concorde and activate a special lighting system optimized for video.

Concerned about the dim, straight-overhead lighting common to videoconferencing rooms, NAR installed special florescent fixtures which use 45° angled reflectors to throw bright, but diffuse light onto conference participants' faces. "The plasmas work well with this



NAR boardroom from front, with videoconference lighting. Note the rack in closet at left; the doors in table open to reveal network and projector connections, and the florescent fixtures in ceiling positioned to put soft lighting on participants' faces.

lighting," says United's Doug Carnell, who was in charge of the project, "and at 42" diagonal, they're big enough that everyone can see them clearly." As the system comes on, you note that one plasma shows the far-end site, the other, a near-end preview or images from a document camera or laptop.

The PictureTel Concorde was a great fit for the room. Not only does it handle the multiple sources needed, but it was easy to adapt to the AMX system. Near and far-end camera controls, dialing and a handy one-button connection to NAR's Washington office are all accessed from the touchscreen. The Concorde is also tied to the room's

automatic mic system and to its sound system with ceiling speakers.

Winning the award

The *Best Presentation Rooms* winners are chosen on the basis of technological sophistication, suitability to task and aesthetics. A panel of judges chose the NAR boardroom as its grand prize winner in the conference room category—the nation's best for the year 2000.

NAR executives are ecstatic with what they've built. Hank Welch says "we are especially happy with how easy the room is to use. The controls are understandable and require minimal support.

And the new room works with every technology we use for presentations and to communicate with other sites."

Welch also related this story: "We had a large mortgage company give a presentation here a month ago. I caught the president of the firm outside and he said, 'I don't believe that room. That is the most technically advanced room I have ever seen.' Coming from who it did, that was quite a compliment."

For details on the Best Presentation Rooms competition and on other United Visual systems installations, please visit systems.unitedvisual.com.



United Visual, Inc.
1050 Spring Lake Drive, Itasca, IL 60143-2082
Phone 630/ 467-1500 Fax 630/ 467-1616 Web www.unitedvisual.com