NEEDS ANALYSIS AND SYSTEM PLANNING

6 CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU MEET WITH AN AV INTEGRATOR

by John Laughlin

A thorough needs analysis is crucial to the success of your new AV system. You want to make sure the installed technology will do everything you and your internal customers need it to do, yet still fit within a reasonable budget.

Before you meet with a systems integrator, we suggest you look at the time-honored questions of Who, What, When, Where, Why and How, applied to your new AV system. You don't have to answer every question, but it can be very helpful to start thinking about these crucial factors.

1. WHY BUILD AN AV SYSTEM?

An obvious but sometimes tricky question.

We find that asking how you will justify what will certainly be a significant expenditure can help put the main priorities on the table. Do you need to make a better impression on clients? Eliminate travel? Teach or train more effectively?

It can be very helpful to formulate a brief vision and style statement for the new space. Are you building "the best boardroom in our industry, a place where we can impress high-level clients" or simply "a practical place where we can sit down and talk?"

2. WHO ARE KEY PLAYERS?

It's critical to put the right team together for the initial planning of the room and its technology.

We find that, most often, your planning team should include representatives from IT and facilities management, plus your architect, interior designer and a representative from your general contractor. Your project manager is a crucial team member, whether he or she is a staff member or an outside construction manager. It is extremely helpful to include whoever is making the final

Brooke Sansosti, Visual Resources Curator of the Newcomb Art Department, Tulane University, checks audio settings before a lecture. For servicing and upgrades, she calls on Southern Automated Services, an AV systems integrator based in Slidell, LA, servicing the greater New Orleans area.

decision on the project, whether your CEO, CIO or some other manager.

Be sure to include one or more of the room's end-users. They may have their own ideas and expectations for space.

3. WHAT WILL THE USERS WANT TO ACCOMPLISH IN THIS ROOM?

Can you accurately answer the following:

• And to achieve their goals, will they need to make presentations using Power-Point or some other application?

• Will they show video?

• Will they need to annotate or otherwise interact with software or video materials?

• How many meeting participants, clients or students will use the room?

• Will they need to electronically meet with others at different locations?

• Will presenters, meeting participants or students need to share applications or collaborate electronically?

• Will they want to record the meeting or class and perhaps archive it on a video-on-demand server?

4. WHERE WILL THE SYSTEM BE INSTALLED?

Do you see any potential problems with the space? Windows? Pillars? Noisy building mechanics? Vibration? Are there architectural elements that may affect how seating is arranged or where screens are positioned?

Does your organization have any specific infrastructure needs or standards that will affect the project? Are there security standards that must be considered? Benchmarks for data transmissions, etc?

5. WHEN DO YOU NEED IT FINISHED?

Take a step-by-step approach and look at all the phases of construction, working backwards to create a realistic timeline. Be realistic. Allow some extra time for construction delays.

6. HOW WILL TECH PLAY A ROLE?

A good integrator should help you understand technology trends and begin to fit new technologies to your needs.

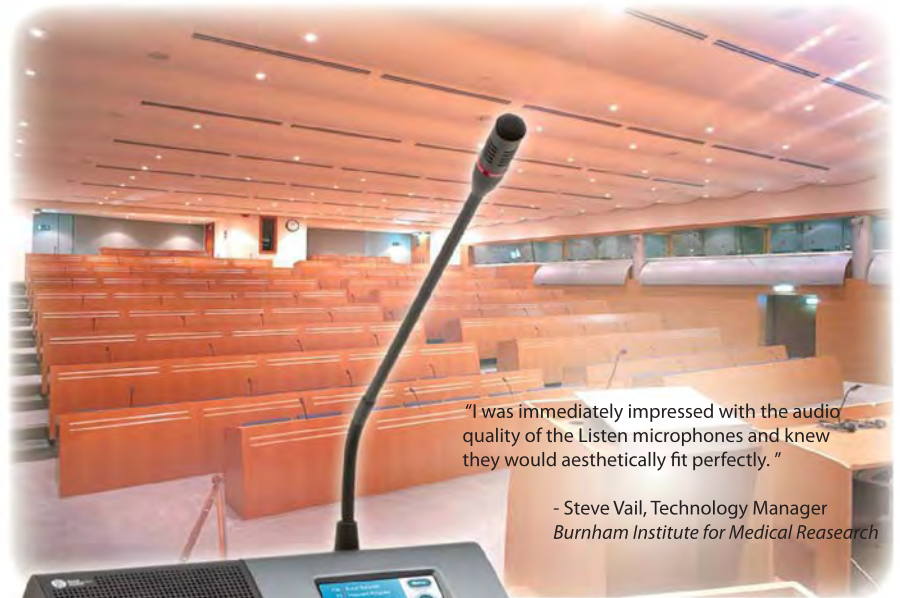Be prepared to talk about your budget when you meet with your integrator. Most likely

you won't know what the new system will cost, but you should have an idea of what a functional space is worth to you. Even a general idea of what you can afford will help your integrator recommend systems that make sense for you.

Your integrator will want to be involved very early in the planning process. You will almost always get a better result for a smaller expenditure if you determine your technology needs before the planning of the physical and mechanical systems is complete.

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