

AV SYSTEM INTEGRATION

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Display technology in the corporate AV market

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favoured location for international corporations and blue chips have set up headquarters that require the best AV for working locally and across borders. When it comes to choosing displays for corporate applications, one size doesn't fit all, but getting it right is key to business success. For this reason Pro Systems News chatted to South Africa's top installers and integrators to ask them about what display technologies are most appropriate or most popular in the corporate market



South Africa has become a

As the leader of information and communication technology (ICT) development in Africa, and boasting a 99.9% digital telecoms network, the South Africa's corporate AV market has been growing steadily in the past few years. However, the country is not impervious to the global financial crisis and it is still recovering from its own 2008/9 recession.

"The financial crisis has brought about changes in procurement policies within large corporates," comments Stuart Pringle, MD at Omega Digital Technologies. "Due to this sales cycles are longer, competition is fiercer and therefore margins are under huge pressure. "Clients still spend their money, but unlike the USA, the financial crisis didn't turn the lights off immediately, but rather heightened the need for companies to watch where they spend money and how much they get in return for their investment. Relying on hardware margins alone is not possible anymore. A mature services business is an absolute must for all AV integrators such as ourselves that wish to compete in the SA market today."

In fact, according to recent reports, South Africa's economy is expected to grow 2.5 % this year, instead of the 3.1% the World Bank estimated in November 2011 and the 2.7% the government predicted in February. The less optimistic forecast for economic growth comes as a consequence of a global slowdown and high unemployment in the country. In a move to bolster the economy the South African Reserve Bank has cut interest rates by 50 basis points, from 5.5% to 5%. Pringle says: "I don't expect a major impact for our industry in the short term due to the drop in interest rates, but every bit of relief is a step in the right direction."

Size isn't everything

Whether you are thinking of revamping a boardroom, an auditorium or a training facility, the size of the screen is only one of the many factors you need to take into account. The number of people expected to use the space, its ambient light, the type of network connections and connections with mobile devices are all essential components of today's corporate installations. For applications where a larger image is needed, projectors are the usual choice. However, with flat screen prices going down and screen sizes increasing, they are becoming a viable alternative to projectors.

Says Questek MD, **George van Gills**: "The technology trend in projection is DLP, due to its low cost of ownership. However we find for smaller facilities flat screen (LCD) is gaining more ground." Questek uses Barco projectors for high-end installation and projectiondesign and Optoma for smaller installations."

Danie Venter from BIS, a specialist in dynamic as well as complex AV & ICT solutions, says: "Projection technology will maintain its rightful place in larger environments but flat screen is a favourite in the smaller collaboration environments."

Adré Joubert, director at systems integrator and video conferencing specialist F.R.O.G. AV agrees: "For video conference applications we are using flat screen LCD or LED displays or a combination of projector with LCD or LED screens. Educational institutions use a combination of interactive whiteboards and projectors."

F.R.O.G. AV is a distributor for Dell projectors in South Africa. These projectors, which go only up to 5 000 ANSI lumens, are suitable for medium and small end installations. For large auditorium installations the company supplies other brands such as Epson, Vivitek or Panasonic.

In the corporate market system integrator Audio Visual Centre (AVC), works with large global or local stock-listed corporations installing mainly boardrooms and training facilities. **Warren Tree**, AVC's technical director, agrees that price is important when choosing technologies.

He describes the three typical corporate installations: "In boardrooms we usually use LCD projectors, but there is a significant shift to flat screen displays. Due to the low-cost of maintenance and the reduced pricing of LCD and LED technologies, more corporates are implementing these types of displays over LCD / DLP projectors, specifically in venues with a pax of less than 10.

"Auditoriums are larger venues which need displays greater than 120". LCD projectors with a higher brightness are the most cost effective way to achieve these sizes. For training facility we tend to use DLP projectors."

AVC's brands of choice for high-end installation are: NEC, Sony and Projectiondesign. Epson is used for medium sized installations and for the lower end projects it uses Sony, Optoma and Vivitek. Omega's **Stuart Pringle** details some of the technical requirements: "The most important point in specifying the projection system is the ability to create the correct real-life contrast at the correct resolution. This is a function of the brightness of the projector, the



Three empty rectangular boxes stacked vertically, likely for user input or social media links.

ambient light in the room and the room size. Other contributing factors are the ability to use lens shift and the lens



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robustness, the quality of their products and the after sales service that they offer. "We attempt to limit the number of manufactures we use and even the amount of different models from their line up to ensure that we can support our clients best (loan equipment)," he explained. "We use Christie, Panasonic or NEC projectors."

Pringle adds: "Flat screens are neat and quiet, offer terrific contrast, they are increasingly better at motion handling, increasing in size and also decreasing in cost. The consumer market is driving the manufacturers to innovate continuously while making the technology cost effective.

"Flat screens are often deployed with a signage solution in a foyer area outside of an auditorium to display notices, schedules or even as way-finders. Interactive whiteboards are almost exclusively used in training venues. These are highly collaborative areas that require the trainer to capture and hold the audiences' attention while explaining concepts. They also offer the opportunity for the audience to participate. It is vital that whiteboards are complimented with powerful software including galleries and data sharing capabilities."

Kevin McMillan Craig from Audiotech doesn't see that much of a shift from projection technology to flat screens.

"Projectors are capable of anything an LCD can do and both technologies have their place."

Christiaan Stoop Technical and Operations Manager at Symantix, says: "Although the LCD projectors deliver a sharper quality picture especially for spreadsheets, I still prefer to install DLP projectors as I find LCDs not as reliable in the South African climate. We usually install LCD flat screens when we do a video conference setup whereby the