

Convergence Confusion



• Digital technologies have brought an anthem of ideas on convergence. We may have heard every scenario and can see that some early ideas have already fallen by the wayside. Often, the confusion on convergence is centered on the new digital technologies well established in many industries and incorrectly concluding that all industries will converge.

We certainly have seen the growth of digital technologies in AV communications. In 2001, InfoComm placed its first AV/IT pavilion on the show floor to highlight the new digital future of the industry. At that same show, Sony showed a projector with a network connection. Since that time, we have videoconferencing over IP, audio DSP, network-based signal distribution and control, media servers, and much more.

Other industries are experiencing the same phenomenon, and many of them are farther along the path. If you go to the GlobalCom show, you will see the full array of digital telecom-

practices to help make our members competitive and superior to their competition. We have been doing exactly that and look forward to providing additional assistance in the future.

But what about the confusion of technology and industries over what convergence means? InfoComm has not deviated from believing in and promoting the AV communications industry, even as it has gone through a digital revolution. We have not succumbed to requests to quit using the word AV—many of which came five years ago from manufacturers who wanted to identify with the IT industry because that was hot at the moment.

We also reject attempts to homogenize our industry into what another association has called the low voltage and/or electronics systems industry. First, low voltage makes little sense in trying to characterize an industry by the amount of current it uses. It only serves to differentiate you from electricians who do high voltage. But that can backfire. Just a few months ago, I heard

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munications companies, including Cisco, Microsoft, and other IT hardware and software companies. If you go to ISC West, you would see the same occurrence in the security industry. And even closer to many of us is BICSI, where you can see that the information transport industry is fast becoming a digital-based industry.

You will also see that these industries can potentially overlap with AV communications because of their reliance on digital technologies. This presents opportunities that members of all these industries are beginning to embark upon. How many of you are doing a little security, a little structured cabling, and maybe even providing telecomm services? How many in these other industries are beginning to do some AV? We know this is happening as individual business owners look to see what products and services they can profitably bring to their customers.

Sometimes InfoComm is pressed to keep those other guys out of our industry. That is a natural response to competition, but one that is both undoable and would probably be illegal. What the association can do is equip individual business owners with market research, information, education, certification, and best

practices to help make our members competitive and superior to their competition. We have been doing exactly that and look forward to providing additional assistance in the future.

The other homogenization attempt throws all industries into "electronics systems." Thus, anything electronic falls right in, which, I suppose, includes computer makers, telephony, consumer electronics, security, AV, sprinkler systems, and just about anything invented since the introduction of the transistor.

I don't think the electronic systems industry is going to replace the IT, telecommunications, security or, for that matter, the AV industry. Each of these industries is using digital technology for the benefits of the customer, but they each have distinct areas of expertise and skills that keep them separate.

Trying to be all things to all people is a fool's errand. Don't confuse your business, your employees, or your customers with this mistake. Stay focused on your core competencies and leverage when new opportunities arise from industry overlap.

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