

# Choosing an AV Provider

From educational facilities to government agencies, to businesses, to architectural firms and facility managers, today's lecture, communications, sales, advertising and conferencing functions demand professionally designed, installed and produced audiovisual (AV) presentation systems.

Depending on the size of a company or facility, there may be an information technology (IT) department or staff person in-house needing assistance to bring your communications capabilities up to speed using the modern technology and systems available. An AV solutions provider offers guidance in determining how to proceed before needlessly expending time and money to research the options.

Small organizations may not even have an IT or AV department, and this resource provides a roadmap of who to contact, whether you need to rent, buy or install AV equipment, or simply need a resource to produce an event.

Larger companies, government and military agencies, or higher education institutions are more likely to have AV departments, AV managers and AV technicians on their staff. These may be part of the communications department or part of the information technology or information systems department. Even in this situation a skilled AV provider can offer services that enhance an organization's communications strategy.

## How Can I Access These Resources?

Visit the InfoComm member search or the [AV Products and Providers directory](#) to search for a company that specifically meets your needs. Here you will also find case studies and pictures of boardrooms, auditoriums, houses of worship, command and control centers, and other AV environments.

## Design and Construction of Facilities

When dealing with the design and construction of a new communications facility (a boardroom, auditorium, command and control center, videoconferencing facility or entire high-tech building), it is important to identify AV needs early in the process. A myriad of building considerations should be addressed during the design process, including lighting, space design, sightlines, acoustical requirements, cooling and electrical loads, furniture designs, wiring, networking and many others. When refurbishing or renovating an existing facility, many of the same considerations must be addressed, and the task is often more challenging because the audiovisual systems must be integrated into an environment that may not be conducive.

To help you with all your AV needs, there are different types of companies and resources available. These are companies that are all part of the professional AV industry. InfoComm International® is a membership association that represents all types of professional AV companies as well as individuals who work as AV managers and technicians. With the unique requirements of designing, installing and operating AV systems, training and certification is a strong focus of the association and its members. AV professionals must also understand and work with the complexities of information technology systems and networked environments.

## What is the AV Communications Industry?

The AV communications industry centers on the technologies, products and systems for visual display, audio reproduction, video and audio production, interfacing and signal distribution, lighting, control systems, interactive display and audio presentation systems, remote video and webconferencing, and the furniture, cabling, connectors and racks to tie them into a system.

This industry interfaces with the information technology and telecommunications industries to create and transport the information that is presented to the intended audience.

## What AV Resources Are Available?

**Systems Integrators:** AV technologies are often installed as integrated systems and require skilled installation professionals to ensure compatibility with existing information technology, to ensure the systems will work the way they should once installed, and to ensure that staff has sufficient understanding and training to work the system. Simplifying the use of many different AV components into one, simple user interface controller (i.e., a remote control, or touch panel) is the role of a design consultant (see below) or systems integrator. Some integrators also design systems, and they are known as design/build companies. These integrators spend time understanding AV needs and the expectations you have of your new AV system and then design a custom solution for you. Post-installation services can also be provided by the systems integrator in the following ways:

Phone — support over the telephone for basic malfunctions and customer assistance

On-site — for basic service and repair

Online — New technology now allows systems integrators to monitor and control nearly all system functionality remotely through the use of the Internet and advanced software technology available from many AV product manufacturers.

**AV Dealers:** AV dealers come in many different types and sizes, but primarily they are local or regional companies or branches that are authorized resellers for the many different types of equipment required to meet your audiovisual needs. Some dealers also install the technology and are referred to as systems integrators (see above). Some dealers offer equipment rentals and service in addition, and are known as rental and/or staging companies (see below). Primarily, AV dealers can offer specific knowledge and added value to any professional environment over purchasing equipment through consumer channels, because they are trained in the products they represent and understand and can communicate important information about functionality of the equipment and its integration into the facility.

**AV Manufacturers:** AV manufacturers produce the presentation and communications technologies used in sound, display and projection systems, including audio-, video- and web-conferencing, digital signage, control systems, networking equipment, display monitors, lighting and studio support, projection screens, projectors, recorders and players, recording media and storage systems, streaming media equipment, video production equipment, whiteboards and presentation accessories. Manufacturers sell their products through channel distribution partners including dealers, manufacturers' representatives, and independent representatives, who are trained by the manufacturers to market, demonstrate and offer products to end users.

**Rental/Staging Companies:** Staging and AV rental companies offer large- to medium-size event staging and AV technology rentals as well as rental production services for corporate meetings, conferences, conventions, tradeshow, product launches, special events, entertainment and concerts. These companies may provide services locally, regionally or nationally. AV engineers, technical directors and technicians are on-hand for the duration of the event to set up, strike and operate projectors, cameras, screens, sound systems, scenic elements, lighting and even special effects if needed. When working with hotels or convention centers, customers should determine the best source for their needs, whether to use the hotel's in-house AV resources or to hire an external company.

**Independent Design Consultants:** Independent design consultants are often hired by architects or directly by clients to identify a client's AV needs, determine best options for the design of a system, including lighting, sound, image and control, and produce specifications for the job that can then be competitively bid by qualified systems integrators or negotiated with a preferred integrator. Routing video, audio, data, PC-video, as well as designing the lighting and power distribution appropriately in a room requires the expertise of a system designer who understands complete system functionality.

Design consultants act as the owner's technical representative to ensure that systems integrators are performing the job according to professional specifications as well as handling issues that may arise during construction. Using a design consultant offers an added value of obtaining independent advice on components of the system, regardless of product brands and the opportunity for competitive pricing for the AV equipment and installation.

**Presentations Professionals:** The hardware required to enhance communications is, of course, the major aspect of AV systems. However, once the hardware is installed and the staff is trained to use it, there is still the need to produce strong, effective, creative presentations that make the best use of the AV equipment and go one step further in providing a return on the investment. Presentations professionals are often hired as in-house resources or as independent freelancers to enhance the message through graphics, marketing expertise and creative application of presentation tools such as PowerPoint®.

**Programmers:** These are professionals working either independently or on the staff of an AV manufacturer or integrator responsible for developing, programming or coding software. Programmers also design the user interface for AV users to access AV systems, such as touch-panel screens to enable videoconferencing.