



WHITE PAPER

ENDING THE AV TECH SUPPORT NIGHTMARE

All about AV control and conference room automation from an IT support perspective

Sophisticated conference room automation technology can work wonders: Control video conferencing equipment, connect mobile devices, switch easily between different inputs and outputs, control environmental features like lighting, adjust audio volume and much more. But it's essentially worthless if it's too difficult for meeting attendees to use or for IT to maintain. This White Paper explains conference room control and automation, and shows how an AV strategy that focuses on both those who use the equipment and those who maintain it will lead to a superior ROI for room AV.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONFERENCE ROOM DISASTERS

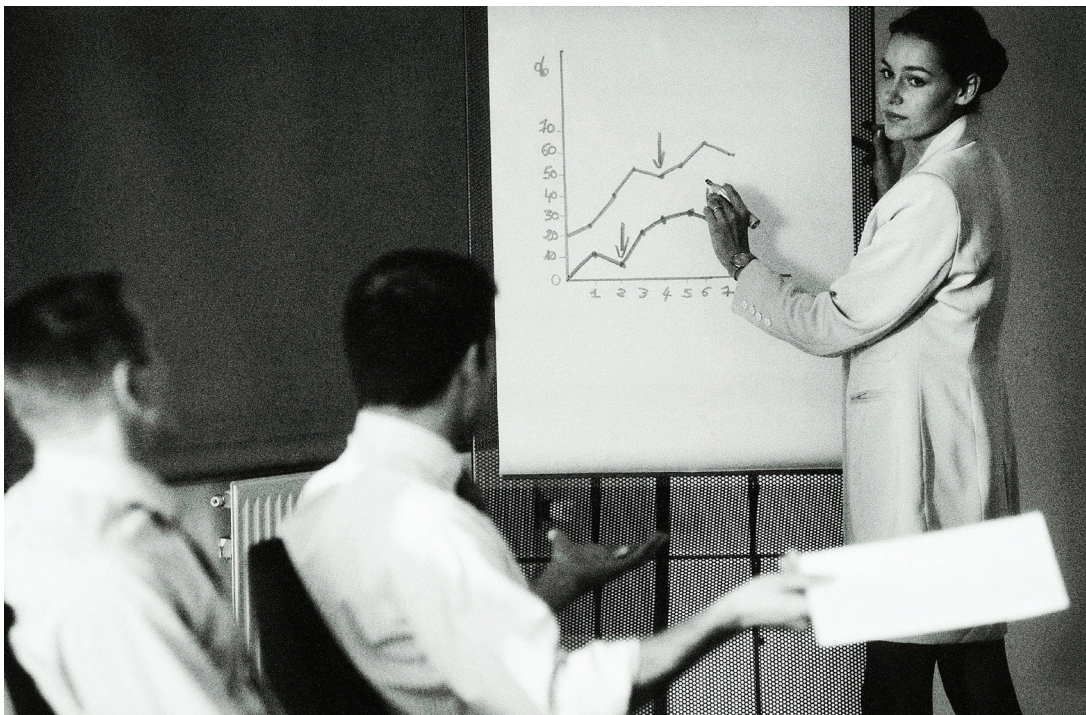
Sometimes, operating AV in the conference room can be a nightmare. It's not uncommon to hear users complaining:



Why did those jokers in IT buy this lousy equipment? Where's the remote that operates this thing? Why won't the display turn on? Did the room PC die?

Call Tech Support now!

Studies have shown that 25-30% of all meetings are considered a waste of time due to issues with controlling or troubleshooting conference room technology like video conferencing systems, display projectors and mobile devices. For the IT or AV support person, this means an unending flood of urgent support calls, as well as taking the blame when things go wrong in an important meeting.



25-30% of meetings are considered a waste of time.

Not too long ago, a conference room was nothing more than a space with a table, chairs, white board and an easel with flip charts. This was soon followed by the advent of the Overhead Projector, a wonderful device that made overhead slides the focus of the business world. Then came a quantum leap in technology that made meetings much more exciting, productive and potentially disastrous: The Laptop Projector. With the laptop projector came the PowerPoint presentation, along with the first wave of those conference room technology complaints:



Why can't I get my slides to appear on the screen? How do I turn this thing on? Hey, this cable won't reach my computer! The projector bulb just burned out! Am I supposed to be able to read that gibberish on the screen?

Call tech support now!

But it got worse from there. After many years in which the PowerPoint presentation and overhead projector were the center of the meeting universe, companies added an arsenal of capabilities to their meetings: Video and audio clips, internet access, document cameras, video conferencing systems, interactive presentations from multiple sources, and so on.

And so the modern conference room was born – along with a whole host of problems for the IT and AV technicians who support them.



IT'S AN IT WORLD



To an IT organization, the world revolves around the uptime of the systems they support. In the past, AV was not part of this paradigm, because AV systems were not composed of devices that were visible on the IT network. Most AV equipment was connected serially and lacked IP addresses.

From an IT perspective this was a significant problem, because it was impossible for IT to remotely diagnose, maintain and monitor the equipment. AV equipment failures were almost always urgent, which meant IT support personnel were forced to drop everything and race to the problematic conference room to diagnose the problem on site. Trouble tickets were always high priority.

Fast forwarding to today, the situation is vastly different. AV systems are now IT-centric and networkable, which means there's no real difference between AV assets and other IT assets from a support perspective. Your NOC can now monitor and manage AV assets exactly like other IT assets, and perform key tasks such as:

- Monitor performance and uptime
- Monitor energy usage
- Receive notifications and alerts
- Diagnose and troubleshooting problems remotely
- Keep AV assets secure



This phenomenon of IT-centric AV has created a better world for IT personnel. But what does it all mean for those who actually use the equipment? And are there other advances in AV technology that benefit IT support personnel? The first place to look is in the area of AV control and automation.

WHAT IS CONFERENCE ROOM CONTROL?



To properly explain conference room automation, we must first describe conference room control. Conference room control allows a user to press a button or icon to execute a single action to control a device in the room. Think of a universal remote: It's where you press buttons to make your system take specific actions like show content from a laptop on a certain display, or dial a number for a video conference. Conference room control is valuable because it provides a simple way for a meeting participant to take command of all the room's technology.

An effective conference room control system centers around the user interface (UI). In most cases this is a control panel or keypad on which a user presses buttons or icons to execute certain commands. For example, a typical conference room UI might consist of a control panel that includes buttons for turning on the projector, switching between a laptop computer and room PC, and a button (or sequence of buttons) for activating and controlling the video conference system. By providing an intuitive interface for controlling the meeting, you're reducing the number of support calls and dramatically improving user satisfaction.

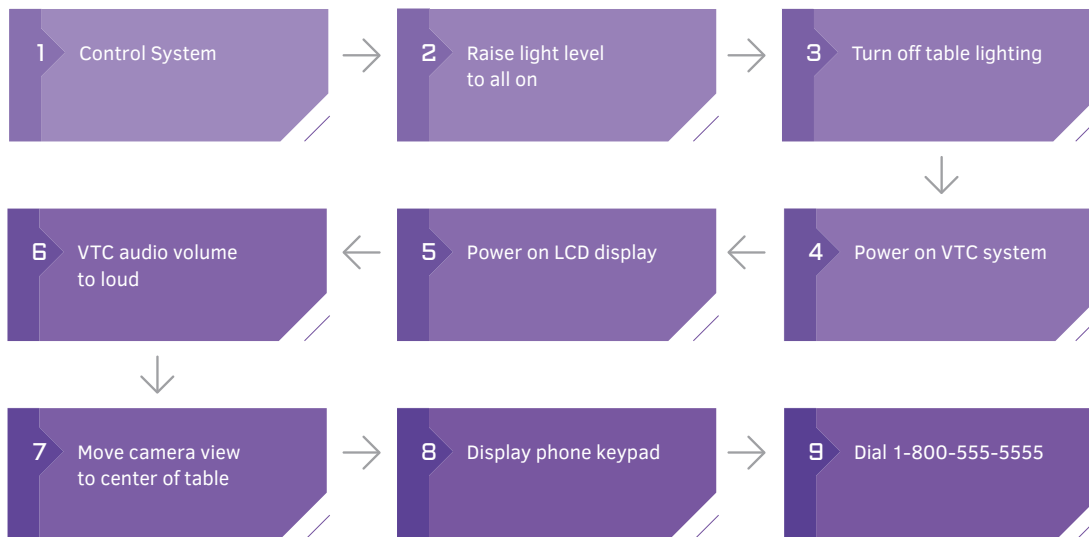
WHAT IS CONFERENCE ROOM AUTOMATION?

Conference room automation is the next logical step in making it easy to manage conference room systems. Automation wraps a layer of intelligence around the control system by combining multiple tasks into a single automated action. In this case an "automated action" might be pressing a button or icon, activating a sensor, reaching a certain time of day, or turning off/on a certain piece of equipment.

Automation also incorporates integrated scheduling into your control system. With scheduling, you can book a room and integrate its overall schedule with the schedules of meeting participants. You can also pre-configure a room so that the system is ready to use when attendees arrive so that there's no time wasted on waiting for a device to warm up.

Automation vs. Control

With automation, you can combine several tasks into a single push of a button or scheduled command. Tasks in a control system are executed one by one, like this:



On the other hand, tasks in an automated system are combined, so that the above process happens at a single button press, like this:



An automated conference room gives users the absolute best experience, and eliminates most of the problems that result in support calls.

A BUSINESS MEETING WITH NO CONTROL SYSTEM OR AUTOMATION

To best describe control and automation, let's look at how the same meeting might take place in a room with no control or automation vs. a room with an integrated control system. Our first environment is the room with no control system – it's simply a meeting room with a laptop projector, a display, a DVD player and a video conference system – each with a separate remote control.

The first thing that happens is that people start showing up, not really sure if they're in the right place at the right time, since there's no room schedule displayed outside the room.



Once that's resolved, the first presenter connects their laptop to the projector, only to find that the presentation won't show up on the display. They reach for the three or four remotes sitting on the table and start pressing buttons, not even certain which remote goes with which device. Somebody turns the projector on and off. Finally, through blind luck, they get the presenter's content to show on the screen. Or, they might call for tech support.

But then another participant wants to show their content on the screen, so the first participant unplugs her laptop from the projector and hands the cord to the second participant. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. It's another opportunity for a call to tech support.



Then another participant wants to show a video clip from the room's DVD player, which is connected to a small display. Time to shut down the projector, turn on the display, turn on the DVD player and dim the lights. This all takes considerable time, because these devices need time to warm up.

When the meeting's finally over, the participants file out of the room, leaving the lights and equipment powered on and wasting energy.

You get the picture: A conference room without control is a conference room out of control.

A BUSINESS MEETING WITH A CONTROL SYSTEM

The contrast between a meeting held in a room with a control system and a room without one is striking. In this example of a room with a control system, the conference room has a control panel outside the door that displays the room's schedule. Attendees glance at the schedule and know that they're in the right place at the right time.

In this room there's a control panel on the table that controls all the room's equipment, along with an architectural connectivity solution that provides users with a quick and easy method for connecting their devices to the system. To start the meeting, the first attendee connects a laptop to the cable extending from the connectivity solution. They touch a button on the control panel, the projector powers on, and after a minute or so of warm-up, the content appears.



Modero X Scheduling Panel
outside a conference room



When it's time to switch to the second presenter, that person simply connects the cable to their PC, and their content instantly appears. When it's time for the DVD, they press another button while an attendee dims the lights. After a minute of warm-up, the video is playing.

In addition, some conference rooms include a dedicated content management device like AMX's Enzo® that makes it easy to show content from mobile devices like tablets and smartphones, or to retrieve content from the internal or external web.

When the meeting's over, the meeting organizer presses a "shut down" button on the control panel, and everything in the room turns off. All in all, it's a vastly superior experience for the attendees, with far fewer chances for a support call to IT.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR CONFERENCE ROOM AUTOMATION

Clearly, a control system makes for a better user experience. However, investing in conference room automation technology also makes good financial sense for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons include:

Fewer support calls

You can better utilize technical support resources

Reduced energy costs

You can power down equipment when it's not in use

Reduced travel costs

Better control and automation means more effective video and web conferencing. Why take a trip when you can meet virtually?

Faster meeting starts

with less waiting on the technology

Reduce employee time wasted

in search of an available meeting space

Better longevity of equipment

thanks to intelligent on/off and standby modes.

As you can see, an automation system can help maximize employee efficiency and productivity, as well as eliminate the frustrations that so commonly plague these spaces. When you combine the improved employee collaboration and increased room utilization with the cost savings of reduced support costs, a control system by AMX can truly bring an end the AV tech support nightmare.

TAKING ACTION

To learn how AMX's award-winning products can help your organization optimize your AV investment in meeting spaces, we invite you to explore our website and contact one of our Solutions Advisors.

The LEARN page (<http://amx.com/automate/learn.aspx>) includes a wealth of general resources on the AV industry.

The PLAN page (<http://amx.com/automate/plan.aspx>) includes an interactive tool that allows you to visualize the typical conference room and huddle space configurations that AMX offers, and to explore which room configuration is best suited to your needs.

You can always CONTACT A SOLUTIONS ADVISOR, who will be glad to guide you through the process of identifying, specifying and purchasing your ideal conference room or classroom AV solution. The "Contact an Advisor" link is at the top of every page of the AMX website. Options to connect include chat, phone and email.



About AMX by HARMAN

Founded in 1982 and acquired by HARMAN in 2014, AMX® is dedicated to providing AV solutions for an IT World. AMX solves the complexity of managing technology with reliable, consistent and scalable systems comprising control, video switching and distribution, digital signage and technology management. AMX systems are deployed worldwide in conference rooms, classrooms, network operation/command centers, homes, hotels, entertainment venues and broadcast facilities, among others. AMX is part of the HARMAN Professional Group, the only total audio, video, lighting, and control vendor in the professional AV market. HARMAN designs, manufactures and markets premier audio, video, infotainment and integrated control solutions for the automotive, consumer and professional markets.

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