

FOOD MARKET ENTERS THE DIGITAL AGE

Grocery chains with less than 900 stores are generally viewed by their competitors as antiques hanging on by their fingernails. Yet one such throwback is constantly two and a half steps ahead of its competition, in part because it is the creator of one of the most technologically endowed and uniquely used conference center in this or most other industries.

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CHALLENGE

Converting an analog audio-video conference space into a state-of-the-art facility, featuring movie theater-like image quality, fixed mount and handheld HD video cameras for IMAG and live streaming, and the ability to integrate live remote video into ongoing presentations...all without interrupting the day-to-day use of the existing conference center.

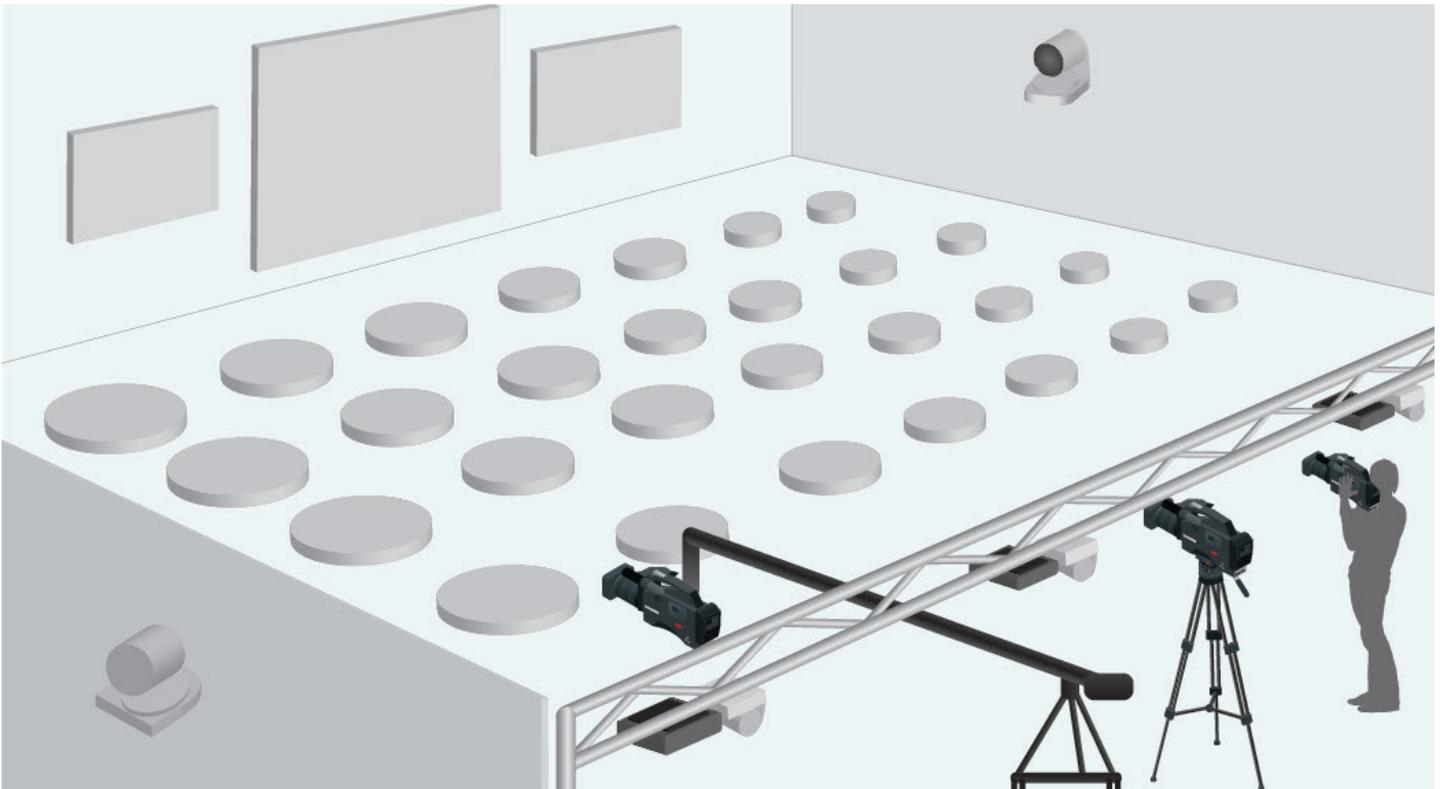
SOLUTION

Meticulously phased-in deployment of high-definition, high-output Panasonic PT-DZ21K2 projectors, fixed mount, remotely operated AW-HE130 fixed mount pan/tilt/zoom (PTZ) cameras, and AJ-PX270 P2 AVC-Ultra Recording-capable and wireless streaming HD "use-anywhere" camcorders.

RESULT

A complete makeover of an obsolete conference center into a 600-seat, multiple-use facility that hosts 300-plus events per year, powered by a Panasonic video streaming and projection system that has met or exceeded every one of the client's stringent design, implementation and performance specifications.

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SCREEN IMAGES THAT MUST BE SEEN TO BE BELIEVED

Picture, if you will, a theater that comfortably seats 600 at tables that can be used for anything from taking notes at a business conference to eating a gourmet dinner at a fundraising event. Somewhat reminiscent of the old-school Cinerama theaters, the new conference center has three projection screens – two of them 16 by 9 feet and another 24 by 13 feet, giving the room an impressive 613 square feet of projection space.

Even more impressive, each of the screens is illumined by one of three truss-mounted 20,000-lumen-class Panasonic PT-DZ21K2 DLP projectors, outputting higher brightness levels than many digital projectors powering multiplex movie theater screens.

“It’s not even fair to compare the new projectors to what we had before,” said the Director of Audio Visual Services. “It’s not even a contest in terms of brightness and clarity. What I can say is that we’re tickled with the quality of the Panasonic projectors, the realism of their colors, the brightness of the image, the extended lamp life, the really long, 12,000-hour Eco filter maintenance cycle... the whole package.”

Regardless of a screen’s brightness and clarity, content is still king when it comes to delivering images that will resonate with and engage viewers. Even the most arresting presentation will lose its impact if presented on IMAG projection showing less-than-perfect color saturation, contrast range and fine-detail resolution.

To provide the high-definition quality and color fidelity it wanted for IMAG support, the company selected five remote-controlled Panasonic AW-HE130s PTZ cameras with revolutionary new features such as Power over Ethernet+ (POE+) for easy integration, multi-stream transmission of H.264 HD video and audio (up to 1080/60p at 25Mbps) and Panasonic’s proprietary DRS (Dynamic Range Stretch) and Hybrid Digital Noise Reduction technology.

Able to produce stunning images even in low-light conditions, the AW-HE130’s unparalleled detail and color rendition are enabled by the same high-sensitivity, low-noise, 1/3” 3-MOS image sensors and digital signal processors also used in best-in-class broadcast camcorders such as the Panasonic’s AJ-PX720s, which was chosen to handle live video streaming from both local and remote locations.

“We’ve mounted three of the Pan/Tilt/Zooms on the truss with the projectors and have two mobile units that we plug into wall ports located throughout the center,”

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one of the installers said. "Of the four P12 (AJ-PX720) camcorders, two can be used anywhere, shoulder mounted or on a tripod, one is permanently mounted on a JIB and controlled by an operator on the floor and one is generally a backup.

"Frankly" the AV Director notes, "the solution is much better than we even expected."

A MULTIPLICITY OF USES AND USERS

"Last year, our five-person department did over 400 events, and the majority of them were in the conference center," he said. "We use it for all the traditional things like sales seminars, safety training programs and store managers' meetings. We also have mini-trade shows where some of our vendors come in and demonstrate their new products.

"Generally, for these types of events, we use the P2 cameras to support the robotic PTZ cameras so that if we need some close work, we have a mobile camera and an operator who can zoom in on what we need, and stream it right into the ongoing presentation. We also use the P2 cameras offsite so that we can stream in remote speakers or presentations and integrate them into our shows in real time."

LAST VENDOR STANDING

Like most companies planning a major multimedia upgrade, a rigorous roadmap for selecting equipment manufacturers and resellers was established, only the path may have been a bit more rigorous than most. With a small five-person AV crew, reliability from their products and partners was a major consideration.

"I've had a lot of experience with video systems and those experiences have varied greatly depending on the installer and his capabilities," one of the techs on the acquisition committee related. "Generally they love to sell and install systems, and do a very poor job of servicing the account after the fact.

"So the first thing we did was put out an RFI for a resale, installation, training and service provider because this was going to be a huge integrated effort including some technology that was new to us, and it was essential that we make the right choice of vendor."

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"Once we decided on our integrator, we did an RFP for the equipment, and the integrator began bringing in different manufacturers' components that met our specifications so that we could have a shootout right here in our facility."

In general, features evaluated during the shootout were informally divided into "lay person side" and "operational side."

The "lay person" side consisted of so-called "eye appeal" items: the "look" and "feel" of the images, the clarity, brightness, color rendition and other critical display factors. The "operational side" consisted of technical factors like the number and type of inputs and outputs, maintenance characteristics, projection bulb life and other reliability issues because, if you're going to hang them from the ceiling, you want to make sure they don't go out of commission too often.

On the camera side, streaming was a big deal for the AV Department because it was something they didn't currently have the capacity for. They also liked the P2 storage card system, the focal length of the lenses, the input/output selection and, especially, the high/low resolution selector, which, the AV Director said "allows us to record almost four times longer (by using Panasonic's AVC-LongG25 setting) per storage card while retaining HD quality."

To make a long selection process short, the dust and smell of gunpowder eventually settled, as it does after every shootout, and Panasonic was the last manufacturer standing. The chain's AV Director, for one, is virtually euphoric that it was.

Over the course of the entire 18 month project, he says, "Panasonic has been great. They've been totally responsive to our needs and have delivered what they said they would, when they said they would. In fact, they even went 'above and beyond the call' when we had a problem with one of our projectors and they replaced it with a newer model at no additional charge."

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