

Inaugural GovComm a Hit in DC

The first-ever GovComm Conference and Exhibition was held at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC, from November 1 – 2, 2011. This show was the first ever event hosted by InfoComm International specifically targeted to the government AV market. In addition to the show floor, GovComm provided educational tracks, hands-on theatre demos and networking opportunities. Because this was the first year the event was held, attendance was light, however all those in attendance were impressed with the quality and variety of the AV companies exhibiting there.



Some of the companies exhibiting were at InfoComm; however, they featured new and exciting products at the GovComm show. KSI Professional, a Baltimore-based manufacturer of AV furniture, showed their Flex Line credenzas. When you order these beauties, the credenza frame ships immediately, which allows you to build the interior racks and install the credenza on site. Once all construction at the site is finished and the trades are out, the exterior panels (in a variety of stock and custom finishes) ship and are easily installed in place. This two-step process allows the equipment to be installed and tested while construction is still ongoing, but prevents the beautiful finishes of the credenza from being scratched, dinged or otherwise damaged in the work area.

Maryland-based Conference Systems used GovComm to announce its new partnership with Arthur Holm Professional Flat Screen Displays. At the show, the company displayed the Arthur Holm Dynamic Monitors – very slick motorized flat-panel displays that are installed in conference tables and lecterns. Framed in solid aluminum or stainless steel, and featuring fast, near-silent lift mechanisms, the dynamic monitors provide an elegant, modern touch to any boardroom environment, and retract cleanly when not in use.

Projection screens are not a topic that leaps to mind when one talks about trade show wow factors, but Screen Innovations -- co-located in the Ford AV booth -- provided just that. They demonstrated one of their Black Diamond high-ambient light screens on the well-lit convention floor, to amazing effect. The screen material was thicker and less flexible than your average projection screen, but the image provided by an average projector was stunning. Their Zero Edge ultra-thin rigid screen panel featuring the Black Diamond material is marketed as the first affordable large flat-panel alternative. The crisp, bright image displayed in the demo shows this to be more than mere hype. It certainly caught the eye of the government buyers I was walking the floor with!

Speaking of government buyers, GovComm provided a fantastic opportunity for manufacturers to introduce some government-specific products to these elite buyers. As a result, there were a number of companies exhibiting that wouldn't normally show up at a regular InfoComm, CEDIA or CES show – but whose products fill any number of needs for a ProAV integrator these days. Soundmasking.com by Dynasound, for example, provides a number of solutions for eavesdropping protection. The company's countermeasure solutions utilize a variety of acoustic techniques and even offer the industry's first pre-engineered Portable Eavesdropping Protection system available for offsite secure communications.

This is definitely a product in demand by government and military buyers for situation rooms and SCIFs (Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities), but more and more corporate customers are getting interested in securing their communications. As a result, integrators need to know about Soundmasking.com!

Another company new to AV shows with applications beyond the government market is Alertus. Headquartered minutes from downtown DC in Greenbelt, Md., Alertus provides an entire suite of products for interoperable facility notification that meet or exceed the National Fire Alarm & Signaling Code's new standards for Emergency Communications Systems (Chapter 24 – ECS). Alertus' Alert Beacons provide audible signaling and brightly flashing visual indications when activated, as well as a customizable LCD message window for specific details.

The company's solutions are ADA-compliant and meet minimum standards for mass notification as specified by HEOA (Higher Education Opportunity Act) regulations and the Department of Defense Unified Facilities Criteria. The Alertus system was of particular interest to most buyers and integrators in attendance because it also provide a means to integrate their alert system with existing information systems in place via Alertus Desktop. When an alert is triggered -- a fire alarm, a public safety warning, a weather alert -- the Alert Beacons are not the only thing activated. Existing digital signage is changed to reflect the emergency alert status. Individual computer screens and workstations on the network are sent a pop-up warning window. Even text messages and emergency emails -- if such systems are in place -- are sent the emergency alert in real time. In this way, Alertus provides a full range of mass notification to any government, military, educational or corporate facility.

While many of these government-specific manufacturers produce products that can also solve problems in the corporate world, one exhibitor provided very specific solutions for military applications exclusively... and was incredibly cool nonetheless. HDT Global is an Ohio company specializing in fully integrated deployable solutions. Every piece of their mobile command centers is manufactured by the company -- from shelter systems (tents and flooring), environmental control systems, aerial delivery systems (parachutes and secure packing crates) to the technology in use in the command center -- every rack, component and screen. At the show, they actually set up a mobile command center (tent and all!) in the exhibit hall. It featured a large tabletop flat panel display table (similar to the Samsung SUR40, but ruggedized for military deployment), which is used to monitor and plan troop movements and strategic planning. Frankly, even if you don't do any military installations (or even emergency response agency installations), it is worth visiting HDT Global's web site to see just how much cool tech they build! Definitely one of my show favorites!

GovComm provided a number of education tracks and both InfoComm and manufacturer training sessions were provided. Courtesy of Cisco, the show even featured a free catered lunch and networking area both days. I was disappointed that a few major industry players who are InfoComm stalwarts chose not to participate in the show, and I hope they reconsider their choice for next year, especially ones with offices in the greater DC area. (Yes, I'm looking at you, Extron!) Overall, though, despite the light attendance, GovComm went above and beyond my expectations for a first-time show. I urge everyone to attend the next one in 2012.

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