

The Case for GovComm

The inaugural GovComm show, held in November, went off without a hitch, despite light attendance and some lukewarm reception from manufacturers who chose not to participate. However, in many ways, the show was a huge success. It introduced a number of 'new' manufacturers with specific government focus to a large number of regional integrators who need to know about them. It gave out-of-region integrators an excellent opportunity to exhibit and network with local companies familiar with the challenges of government integration, to foster and encourage joint ventures and partnerships to flourish among non-competing small firms so they each can get a bigger share of the government procurement pie. And last, but by no means least, it provided a venue for AV integrators and manufacturers to reach out to the government and military buying sector – a major source of contracting dollars, even in a down economy – without having to fight through a number of other industries and unrelated companies all vying for that same finite attention.



Prior to GovComm, the main shows for AV integrators in this region were FOSE and Government Video Expo – two major shows that very peripherally touch the ProAV industry. So, every year, AV integrators and government buyers looking for AV solutions would attend FOSE and visit the four AV booths hidden among the hundreds of IT booths, trying to filter out the IT noise to get the info and equipment they needed. And they would attend GVE and visit the four or five AV booths among the hundreds of broadcast, production and multimedia booths, looking for that one key solution in the midst of a lot of cool, but useless-to-their-circumstance, technology. It has traditionally been frustrating to the government buyer and to the AV integrator working with the government. On the one hand, skipping these shows meant missing out on the possibility of finding that needed item or solution, but on the other hand, it often felt like a waste of time and energy to spend the entire day at a show for very little result.

Traditionally, during a recession (as we've been experiencing for the past couple of years), one of the few areas of continued spending and growth is in the government market. Indeed, very little seems to stop the folks in Washington from buying, upgrading, replacing, expanding and stockpiling. After all, no matter how the corporate or education worlds tighten their belts, everyone keeps paying taxes and giving the government more money to spend. Plus, those in the government often feel pressure to stimulate the economy by increasing buying when a recession hits. Now, I'm no economist, nor am I a politician. I have no desire to open an ideological debate over deficit spending or government policy from the right of the aisle, or the left. I merely bring this point up to show just how important the government sector is to an industry like AV. No one can afford to ignore or alienate the government. Instead, they need to embrace it and cater to it.

This is exactly what Infocomm has attempted to do with GovComm. It's easy to say, "Well, just have your government customers go to the 'real' Infocomm show... They'll see more there anyways!" Realistically, however, this is not always feasible. One of the greatest reasons for the success of FOSE and GVE over the years is their location in the heart of Washington, DC. It is a simple matter for any government employee to hop on the Metro during the lunch hour or a slow afternoon and see the latest technology, take a class or two, and meet with manufacturers and integrators. Those same buyers, however, would be hard-pressed to get budgets approved and time scheduled around a trip to Orlando or Las Vegas. Generally, very few of the buyers and specifiers ever get the chance to go the 'the big show.' Yet, we rely on them to know what companies and products to trust, what solutions they need in various situations, and how to implement them in their agencies.

GovComm meets the need of those buyers and of the manufacturers and integrators who service them. In the coming year(s), Infocomm needs to stick with the GovComm show model. Don't let one light year at the start discourage its continuation. A show like this one needs to gain some traction! Encourage as many manufacturers as possible to exhibit there next year. No, they don't need huge booths like at the 'big show' but they should have a presence, regardless of how near or far their offices are to the nation's capital.

Also, market the heck out of the show to the government community. Make sure every last government worker knows that GovComm is happening... and where... and when. The lunchtime, drop-in show attendee is often key to the show's success, so make sure they know it is going on. Case in point -- both FOSE and GovComm this year were held in the same lower-level exhibit space within the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, yet FOSE was PACKED – particularly between 11 and 1 – while GovComm was spacious. True, FOSE has had years to gain traction and reputation, but they also did a far superior job in getting word out about the event... to the point that my Metro train on the way to the show featured posters for the show!

The GovComm show has been a long time coming and fills a desperate need for a local, targeted exhibition of AV technology and services to meet government needs. Integrators and buyers in this region have long hoped for such an event, and the first one was very well received by the government employees and contract employees I spoke with over my two days there. Now, if the manufacturers pull together and agree to participate more fully, and the Association provides more advertising and outreach to government employees in advance of the show, the event will grow and flourish until it rivals FOSE for attendance and prestige, giving AV a strong voice in an influential market. We're on the right track, my friends. Now, let's just keep it going and bring it home in the years to come!

Dawn Meade, CTS – also known as AVDawn – is an industry veteran with experience in integration, AV sales, and social media. You can find her on Twitter at <http://www.ravepubs.com/avdawn>, on her AV tech blog, and of course, here at rAVe as a staff writer and as part of the rAVe BlogSquad.

