



ALL RIGHT GOV!

All government departments are under the spotlight to maintain and improve efficiency with better ways to use technology to improve services and lower costs. Computers are just one aspect – AV is proving to be a growing opportunity. Sue Marshall reports.

There's no doubt about it, the government wants to cut out inefficiency and get its departments in order. While civil servants across the land wait to hear if their jobs have been cut as part of an inefficiency purge, the fact is that the last bastions of paper-pushers and pencil-heads (and we mean that in a nice way, honest!), may have met their match with machinery and technology replacing them in the office.

Thanks to re-written rules on government-held tenders, more suppliers can enter the fray when it comes to providing technology. We spoke to several suppliers about how they are approaching these accounts with a view to finding insights and tips for sales teams to get involved with the new – and growing – array of products available.

Darren Lewitt, divisional director at

Midwich, says, "Midwich is constantly working with its resellers to provide the latest technologies for resellers to sell to government departments. In 2005 Midwich has already attended the Consumer Electronics show and Sony's European conference."

This type of activity enables Midwich to gain a march on the market by investigating, identifying, evaluating and incorporating new technologies to improve efficiency. Says Lewitt, "Recent technologies for debate have included wireless, security, screen format, IP monitoring and surveillance and high definition. Toshiba's latest detachable camera arm technology has moved the way classrooms interact with their students. To basically have a digital OHP and projector and a digital camera in one device is fantastic for class interaction. Panasonic's new IP Monitoring cameras provide parents with the ability to see

their children in the classroom and the playground."

Then there's the increasing understanding and use of whiteboards, particularly in the Public Sector, with government standards to maintain and develop, all areas of the Public Sector are constantly searching for more efficient ways of working.

While computers have become such an integral part of our working lives, the down side is that they are a solitary device that encourages individualised, or at best, small group working. However, SMART Boards – a brand of interactive whiteboards – are now used extensively by groups such as the fire, police, ambulance, healthcare, defence and local government offices. According to Steljes, which distributes SMART Boards, there are significant benefits to be gained by the Public Sector when using whiteboards.

They list them as:

- fire service maps and criminal investigation information can be presented to large groups, discussed, annotated over and saved for the future
- information from numerous sources (email, Internet, Intranet, and central databases, can be accessed and presented together)
- training presentations and course notes can be built and saved prior to use
- saved training course presentations provide a record of training activity

In addition, research has shown that:

- people are more involved, attentive, and motivated when using the board (Bell 1998)
- the interactivity of whiteboards results in people learning the application and synthesis of concepts much faster and more effectively than they had been able to do through a laptop/projector model (Wiggins & Ruthmann – 2002).



Steljes' channel manager, Andy Rump, comments, "In government departments today, where effective training and the accurate sharing of up to date information is vital to efficiency, AV equipment such as display screens, projectors and interactive whiteboards are providing a good opportunity for resellers selling into these organisations. Particularly in meeting and training environments, users appreciate the power of working more effectively in large groups and sharing and collaborating over ideas. Instead of an environment where employees and contacts passively receive information, the shared use of interactive whiteboards offers an arena where everyone can interact and communicate as a topic is explored.

"With all these AV products, the key for the government is getting a good balance between price and performance, and any sales person should remember to bundle – for example match interactive whiteboards with projectors in a sale."

"The need to communicate and to communicate well, to share information and the ability to take communication anywhere has resulted in small, multifunctional mobile projectors for a wide range of public sector, education and business uses."

BRIAN WOOD, RAPESCO

Over at Maverick, another specialist distributor of AV equipment, director Mark Tildesley says, "Flip charts and OHPs have long been the standard for any training or meeting environment. These have now been superseded in the education and corporate sectors by the greater flexibility and power of the modern audio visual solution. Classrooms now, as standard, are equipped with a projector, an interactive whiteboard and audio set up – typically an amplifier and speakers. This is because of the efficiencies these resources offer in 'getting the message across'. Getting the message across first time through the effective use of all resources and materials ensures maximum efficient use of everybody's time and money."

Brian Wood, who oversees the Plus brand of projectors, which are made in Japan but sold by Rapesco, comments that, "The need to communicate and to communicate well, to share

information and the ability to take communication anywhere has resulted in small, multifunctional mobile projectors for a wide range of public sector, education and business uses.

"The requirements are high, with a demand for lightweight digital projectors with wireless presentation and PC-free presentation capability. Using DLP technology, the Plus range delivers and offers an excellent brightness to weight ratio anytime, anyplace, anywhere. Efficiencies are now built in as standard. The AV market is harnessing new technology simply and efficiently to everyone's benefit."

So, what's holding you back? If you have schools and local government on your client list, there's obviously a growing opportunity for selling in AV equipment, with great back up available from suppliers to help you out. ■