



The AV and presentation sector has moved into a new phase. We take a look at this new playing field and how to best approach the sell.

## Audio Visual

# Anticipating the future

**a** small golden age of AV business has passed, with spending in the education and corporate sectors coming down from the heights dealers have enjoyed over the past few years.

The growth, according to Maverick's Graham Breakenridge, was due to the increase in demand for AV in general, with AV increasingly used more in everyday business and public environments.

"To meet the demand of this trend and in order to sustain sales, manufacturers realised that their products must be as easy as possible to connect and use. Furthermore, some AV distributors have increasingly offered better customer guidance and support," he says.

"This has allowed even more dealers to become involved with AV, without being a company solely trading in technology."

Neil Wells, business manager of Screen Expert, agrees, adding that, "AV has always been a profitable sideline for office equipment and IT dealers, but with the advancement in the functionality of products and the raise in expectations from the end user, it is becoming more fundamental in the offering."

Except, similar to the trend seen in traditional stationery, there's been a drop in value against the growth in sales volume as prices have lowered.

"Unfortunately the margins, both percentage and pounds, on the main pieces of capital equipment, e.g. the projectors and monitors etc, have declined as prices have reduced," says Tony Cochrane of Bjurab UK.

This situation requires that a dealer interested in making some significant return from this area cannot rely on simple 'box shifting' and should ensure that his sales strategies have a multi-layered approach. This could include straightforward up selling, as Cochrane explains.

"There is an excellent opportunity in complementing AV sales with appropriate accessories such as a projection screen and suitable pieces of furniture such as ceiling mounts. Often, the income from these accessories can now exceed that of the capital item. It is for this reason that



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Bjurab UK (previously TCi) has specialised in this area, giving dealers the opportunity to maximise turnover and profitability from audio-visual sales,” he says.

For higher end installations, dealers should stick to working with an AV partner to specify and install products, but at the smaller end of the scale the proliferation of plug and play products has made it a lot easier to sell electric screens, for example, ‘off the shelf’, says Wells. “There is still a huge disparity between the number of projectors being sold and the number of screens, which is a huge opportunity for dealers to upsell when people are looking at buying a projector for the office. At the end of the day, the viewer is looking at the screen, not the projector, so it is important that the solution suits the application and gives the best possible picture.”

Another tack involves taking advantage of the training offered by a number of AV distributors for their clients. While not only leading to improved product knowledge, this process can help a dealer more profitably upsell on AV. Paul Gardner of 3M Visual Systems believes that even before considering an AV sales pitch to an existing customer, dealers should really ensure they have the in-depth knowledge and expertise in-house to be able to effectively manage and respond to customer requirements, and ultimately add value when equipment is purchased. This means being able to competently train the client on the equipment they’ve purchased.

“Nothing ruins a relationship more than selling an AV system which no-one knows how to use,” says Wells. “The customer does not want to know how the system is installed, just what they can achieve out of it and how it can help them at work.”

In this same vein, Wells highlights that product knowledge is important in selling something to the end user. “We are living in an age of an information revolution, does the end user know about all the

opportunities offered by audio conferencing and video conferencing, or that you can have a system which controls the lighting, screens, projectors and monitors in a room, all from a single touch panel? If you can be the first person to introduce them to a technology they may never have heard of before, they will see you as much more valuable to their business,” adds Wells.

If you really want to make a splash with the expertise angle, Gardner advises that you should seriously consider hiring in expertise, acquiring or buying a specialist AV company or join an AV industry association such as InfoComm International, which offers a variety of services including education, training and certification programmes.

This would be particularly smart if your sales approach was to encompass installation as well; the complete solution. “This is where a tie-up with a local AV specialist could prove worthwhile, combining the office product dealer’s customer knowledge and the audio-visual dealer’s expertise,” says Cochrane.

And while the rise of ‘plug & play’ might tempt the untrained to wade in regardless, expert advice on proper cabling and the installation of the right solution for a particular client’s needs would ensure that any quick fix up sell on the usual batch of stationery would not result in a complete loss of faith, and account.

“In order to sell audio-visual equipment, it is very important to understand the customer’s business and how the need for presentation, in its various forms, fits into the way they operate,” explains Cochrane.

However, expert advice isn’t required to highlight to customers the benefits of professional presentation in, potentially, winning new business for the customer. In addition to the latest high tech presentation equipment, there are also other presentation materials, such as folders, portfolios, flipchart easels etc, within the product portfolio that can still be sold to good effect.

“You would actually be surprised at how many companies are still purchasing high quality projectors and then balancing it on a pile of books or showing the projected picture onto a wall or similar,” says Cochrane. “Certainly there is still a great opportunity to sell accessories such as screens, suitable trolleys, cabinets, stands and so on.”

For the dealer salesperson, ensure you ask plenty of questions and provide a solution sell to a client’s AV needs. Only this way can you include the margin-vital upsell opportunities often ignored by the specialist AV and IT dealers competing for their slice of the pie. ●