



Conference and training equipment is an area of continuing growth and great sales opportunities. Are you getting your share of the business?

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THE GRAVY TRAIN

There is currently an advancement of new technologies in conference and training equipment and, as a generation, we now expect better presentations as standard.

Manufacturers and distributors have caught on to this trend and are offering their support and advice to dealers. We take a look at what manufacturers and distributors are offering dealers and resellers, and why you shouldn't shy away from selling to large corporations that may require a lot of manpower and resources.

Technology is now much more affordable than companies think. The prices of projectors in particular have dropped by almost 50% over the past 12 months. In essence industry is bored with the barrage of PowerPoint presentations, they no longer have impact. We need to be looking at more innovative ways of communicating with groups and larger audiences.

There are a number of different products available now to enable interactivity with the audience, from interactive whiteboards to LCD panels and wireless tablets, and the schools market has been the first to adopt interactive technology. As today's students are the workforce of tomorrow, interactivity as part of the group communication process is something they will expect when they take their place in industry – they will not accept the old methods of dry marker boards, OHPs and flipcharts.

There is also an increasing demand, and therefore greater opportunities, for AV equipment, projectors and video/teleconferencing facilities as there are proven psychological benefits of a delegate's interaction in the learning process, in terms of both motivation and concept retention. The advantage of bringing interaction into any presentation is that it involves the audience; the presenter doesn't just hide behind technology but uses it to enhance the delivery of their message in a much more dynamic way.

Demand for this equipment, although still existing in education, has moved out into corporate and public spaces as well. In training and conference environments where retention of information is key, interactive equipment is the ideal solution as it improves connectivity with the audience and, ultimately, communicates ideas more effectively.

Manufacturers have realized they need to become more reseller friendly and are offering support and advice to the end user – through you. It has never been easier for a reseller who might not necessarily have the expertise themselves to add more margin to the sale by bringing an expert supplier in to help, especially because the whole process is so seamless and transparent.

Steve Dracup, MD of Promethean AV Distribution, says, "To date, only a limited number of resellers have caught on to the opportunities of supplying interactive

technologies into the corporate market. Over the next five years we expect a much greater take-up of interactive technologies across commercial applications. We believe they will be widely adopted and become the norm in industry to replace the more traditional methods."

Maverick can take any project through to its full completion, and offer full site survey, Crestron control system, and installation services. However, Maverick remain strictly trade-only, meaning this entire process is carried out with Maverick wearing the reseller's shirt, and representing the reseller in a professional manner.

Adding interactive whiteboards to an office equipment dealer's product portfolio may initially require a higher level learning curve to develop sales, but, says Phil Waterhouse, office equipment account manager at Steljes, "The rewards are there for the dealers committed to driving this market." Dealers do not need to develop an entire sales structure to support this, as many distributors will work with dealers to get them up to speed. For example, with the objective of raising the standards of the interactive whiteboard experience for the end user, Steljes has launched a reseller Accreditation Programme with standardised installation and training as core aspects.

In an increasingly competitive and ever-changing market place, dealers need to constantly seek new revenue streams. Dealers should work with manufacturers and distributors when selling to their key customers – you'd be surprised by how willing your suppliers are to help, after all, they want the business too.

- A GOOD DISTRIBUTOR SHOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING:**
- Knowledgeable sales people, capable of helping you sell to your key customers
 - Comprehensive literature and catalogue support
 - Comprehensive service and back up hotlines
 - CAD / CAM room planning support, when selling in conference & training products
 - Up to date websites on all key products
 - Simple sales techniques or guides to selling new and technological products

If you have a key customer to whom you are already selling EOS, stationery and other office supplies, then why let a reluctance or perceived lack of knowledge of selling high tech products get in the way of growing your business? The office dealer channel represents a growing market for selling high technology products such as DLP data & video projectors and interactive display tablets.

In the past, these sorts of activities have been the domain of the IT or AV specialist, and office dealers have not challenged them because of a perceived inability to sell high tech or seemingly complex products. Office dealers can now use their hard earned business relationships, together with supportive suppliers, to actively grow this business without huge investments in training or expensive sale specialists.

Mark Wilkinson, Nobo multimedia manager, Acco Europe, says, "We have realised that dealer salespeople are comfortable selling products they know and will shy away from selling products they don't know inside out. Furthermore we are increasingly told that many dealer sales people sell 'service' and not product. If both the above are true then dealers need to challenge their distributors and manufacturers to help them sell high ticket items such as DLP projectors or high ticket items such as furniture."

Acco have introduced a nation wide dealer support team to help dealers understand the more complex products in the portfolio and, in many cases, actually visit the dealer's key customers to do the selling job.

Embrace the latest market demands and technical developments to ensure that you can maximise your sales opportunities. As the price continues to fall, more and more companies are using new technology for conference room and meeting room applications. As Graeme Gladwinfield of Metroplan Ltd, manufacturer and stockist of presentation products, says, "Dealers must grasp the sales opportunity and convert to immediate business."

Ask your distributors what support they can offer you. One final point, that shouldn't be forgotten, is that there is also a cost benefit to implementing this technology – how many paper flip charts do companies go through in a year? The ability to produce everything electronically, save and email to your audience is a great cost saving. ■