



AV — A NEW TWIST!

With the continuing convergence of telecommunications, computers and traditional visual and written communications, the area of audio visual is beginning to take on a whole new meaning for the office products industry.

BY JANE SMITH

These days, it's possible to combine almost any number of technologies and techniques to achieve your chosen way of presenting and communicating 'collaborative communication technology'.

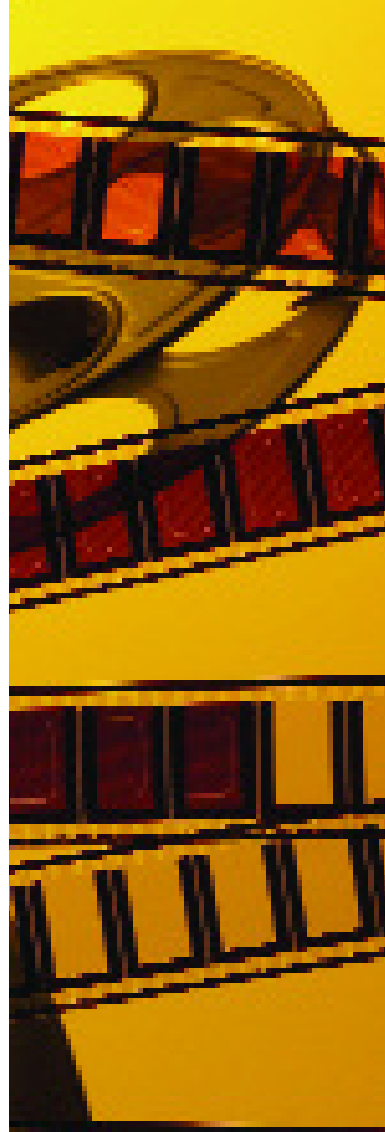
Video conferencing is just one example that's driving demand.

John Beeden, head of business, NEC Business Equipment Division told us, "Growth of specialised AV systems, for example video conferencing, is set to increase — figures from DTC suggest — by at least 10% this year. The requirement for advanced display solutions to support such applications will also lead to continued growth in sales of flat panel technology such as plasma screens — DTC forecasts a 15% increase in sales this year."

We were also very interested to hear from Steljes Trade supporting this view. They have seen a particular increase in demand for plasma dis-

plays, the price of which is dropping. But it's not just price driving the plasma market this summer. Bob Lewis, MD of CFL Systems, explains: "The main objection to using video conferencing to reduce travel costs and increase collaboration between remote sites was the awkward time delay and potential loss of connection. The second objection was cost."

Today advances in technology and increases in bandwidth have virtually removed these delays and dropped connections. As the use of video conferencing in the corporate world has expanded, its cost has fallen. Also, the necessary equipment has dramatically reduced in size and set up time is reduced. Using video conferencing on a plasma screen creates a very professional way of communicating with regional and international offices either using telephony, intranet/extranet or data conferencing. Lewis agreed with Beeden commenting, "Plasma is ideal for supporting



corporate applications such as video conferencing as it offers high image quality for video as well as graphic presentations."

In recognising the increase in demand for video conferencing, Eddie Bance, director of Steljes Hire told us about their ability to hire out equipment through their reseller partners. "By having this equipment we offer resellers the alternative option of hiring out the conferencing equipment to companies who may only need occasional use of the video conferencing facilities," says Bance. "This may help them secure the sales of the display unit."

There is also a growing demand for supporting products such as surround sound to provide the 'audio' to go along with the 'visual'. Additional demand has grown for tools that make the display interactive. This technology gives users all the functionality of an interactive whiteboard on the streamline display.

Likewise, LCD projectors are getting smaller and smaller, cheaper and cheaper and now you can get wireless!

Functionality is being enhanced all the time and so is ease of use with 'plug and play' being the new byword. Although the price of multimedia projectors has come down quickly, as with any developing forms of technology, user awareness and understanding is much improved. Tony Cochrane, MD TCI Limited told us, "Many now

6 Top Tips

- 1. Collaborative communication technology is the way forward. Get yourself up to speed.**
- 2. Video conferencing is growing driving sales of plasma displays**
- 3. Support products and bundling can help secure a sale**
- 4. Check out projection screens – there's now an opportunity to specialise**
- 5. 'New breed' projectors offer wireless technology and fantastic added value features such as inbuilt security**
- 6. Don't forget vertical markets such as education to capture sales at this time of year.**

understand how to compare specifications and make their selection without the need for a demonstration. What wins the sale of a projector is offering a complete solution and a competitive package deal. Finding the appropriate projection screen and ceiling mount or audio visual trolley can make the difference."

Even the screen market has moved on Cochrane explains. While a standard, square format, white projection screen will be suitable for many applications, if only one form of projection is going to be used then a dedicated screen can be

selected. For example most computer/multimedia projectors produce a video format image, while home cinema applications use a wide screen format.

Panasonic who have just brought out a new range of wireless media, where there's no need to connect a cable between the projector and PC (though you can still connect it with cables if you wish). You can also choose to use SD memory cards or PC based wireless remote control functions so that when there's no PC on hand you can still present using the SD memory card which is simply inserted in a slot on the projector.

So all in all, today's projectors are cheaper, smaller and easy to use, packed with functionality.

Interactive Whiteboards are another area where growth is still healthy and prices are falling to within reach of most budgets. Linked to computers these pieces of 'kit' avoid the screeds of paper from a traditional flipchart pad and allow information to be captured direct to the PC.

In terms of vertical markets, the AV range breadth and depth will allow you to find the right solution at the right price for most market places from small business right through to corporates. We've mentioned in the past the education market. It's competitive but very buoyant at this time of year 'back to school' represents an excellent opportunity to sell projectors and interactive whiteboards and other audio visual products. ■