

A certain level of sophistication

Helping corporate clients optimize meetings and presentations



Boardroom at Friebert, Finnerty & St. John with its unusually effective AV system

The woven fabric wallcoverings are imported from Italy. The stylish conference table is trimmed in hardwood, surrounded by black leather chairs. Large windows on two walls give the illusion of space to this uncluttered but upscale room. Clearly a showcase for the Milwaukee law firm of Friebert, Finnerty & St. John, this room hides an audio visual system as vital to the room's success as the ambience that surrounds it.

A perfect fit

FF & SJ partner Matt O'Neill credits their new AV technology with bringing a recent major mediation meeting to a successful finish. "This was a meeting involving six or seven different parties," he says, "and a total of about 15 people, everybody working on the same settlement document. The case involved a judgment of over \$200 million, and the mediation was quite complex. People had been working on it off site, then bringing it back in, but the language was never what everybody thought. We brought everyone here one night, put the settlement up on the big screen and went through it line by line." One problem the firm had was that there was a tight deadline caused by a change in the bankruptcy code. "We finished at 12:30 or 1:00 in the morning, but we got it done. I'm not sure we would have reached a settlement without the new system."

The FF & SJ conference room system was designed and installed by Lewis Sound and Video of Waukesha, Wisconsin. "Many conference rooms have the same general underlying theme," says Susan Lewis, CEO of Lewis Sound. "But that doesn't mean they're all the same. For us it comes down to designing a system that fits their corporate culture."

Lewis Sound had equal success with the new conference room they installed at VJS Construction in Pewaukee. The new system improves the firm's relationships with their clients and polishes their corporate image. "We've probably had three or four interviews now in our new office versus going to our clients' offices," says Rick Andritsch, vice president for business development. "We want them to fully see who we are. We want people to come to us, know where they're at, know what they're buying. When they hire us they now know that they get a certain level of sophistication. We always had it, but now we have an office that demonstrates the brand of service we provide."

Similar systems

Though most corporate meeting rooms include a projector, a screen and sound system, "a lot depends on the budget, on the size, on how much light is coming in through the windows, and where we're putting the equipment," says Lewis. "Quite often it comes down to the conference table. Is it stationary or does it move?"

All of these questions came up for discussion at FF & SJ, where the table includes a central black lami-

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nate utility bay. Users can plug in laptops, microphones and other devices by simply reaching through the wire brush that keeps the connections out of sight. Because the



A wireless control panel, mouse and keyboard at VJS Construction help keep the conference room easy to reconfigure.

table is stationary, it was easy for Lewis installers to run the cables right up into the table.

Open options

Though stationary tables have their advantages, many firms want the option of moving furniture around to suit individual meetings. At VJS Construction in Pewaukee, Lewis Sound installed AV systems in a conference room and a training room that are often reconfigured. "We explained that if they're going to use floor boxes as input points, every time someone wants to plug in, they would have to crawl underneath the table to do so. Do they really want someone crawling under their table?"

Putting the electrical connections into a wall jack is a second solution, but VJS managers chose a third: they went wireless. "All you have to do is press a button on the touchpanel and the monitor comes on, the computer starts up and the screen comes down," says Andritsch. A wireless mouse and keyboard control a computer placed unobtrusively in an entrance alcove. The wireless touchpanel speaks to a receiver hidden in an equipment rack embedded in the wall.

"Since VJS wanted people to see that they had high tech equipment, we cut the rack into the wall and put a smoke glass door on it," says Susan Lewis. Lewis Sound housed a DVD player, VCR and switcher there, stylishly concealed but not invisible. A small data room behind the rack allows easy access to equipment and cabling. A bright, 4100 lumen projector overcomes ambient light from nearby windows.

Keeping it simple

Lewis suggested an even more powerful projector at FF & SJ, where the conference room has two full walls of windows, one to the inner hallway and one to the outside. Lewis installed a 5000 lumen Sanyo, which they mounted on a motorized lift in the ceiling. "The projector is so bright that you can have the shades open in broad daylight and you still get a nice image," says Lewis.

When not in use, the projector is concealed in the ceiling.

With 16 different attorneys using the conference room AV, it was imperative that the system be easy to use. "We decided in broad terms what we wanted," says O'Neill, "and Lewis Sound & Video put it all together. Now we have a touch screen control that my five year old can work. I didn't know it would be as simple to use." Lewis adds that "we generally don't want to have so many pages on a touch panel that people get lost. We try to keep the controls question free."

Lewis says FF& SJ was a project that got the "white glove" treatment. "When we were bringing in and installing equipment we had to be very, very careful not to touch the custom wall coverings," she says. "Everything had to be mounted precisely because we couldn't redo it." Lewis ran a special training session for the installers, making sure they knew the rules and what to wear on their hands for certain parts of the project. As an additional challenge, the crew had to do much of the installation at night, to avoid disturbing other tenants of FF&SJ's downtown building.

Choosing Lewis

Many of Lewis Sound and Video's projects, for example FF & SJ, come from referrals from contractors and other clients. Others are new jobs with established clients like VJS, who know the value of Lewis's work. "You get the vendors that give you what they think you should have," says Andritsch. "And then you get the vendors that listen to what you want and need. Lewis gave us lots of options and we came up with a system we like that was very affordable."

Sandy Wakefield, office manager at FF & SJ, says the new AV system is amazing. "We're a small boutique law firm, but we often play with the big boys," says Wakefield. "I'm always very skeptical because I'm so conservative. They always want to spend money and my job is not to spend money, but now it's like, "What did we do before we had this?" If we're going to play with the big boys we have to have the right toys."



Wireless components also help keep this room at VJS Construction flexible.