

Church & Worship

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Get Smart

HOW ONE SCREEN CAN IMPROVE YOUR CHURCH'S INTELLIGENCE

By Alisa Manjarrez

Major convention centers, businesses, schools and homes have found the secret to simplify their lives with the intelligence of the touch-screen technology—now what about your church?

With one screen, you have the capability to control not only sound and lighting, but also video, security and climate every day that activities are happening in the church. Practically anyone who knows how to use a basic remote control can learn how to run a touch-panel system. Pastors in England, Thailand and Japan are accessing the Web, playing DVDs and controlling the lights straight from

the podium. The emphasis is not just on plasma screens, satellite and hi-definition; the key to this technology is simplicity. Smart simplicity.

Start Smart

Imagine being able to run the lights for one event while making sure the doors are unlocked for another event without having to make several phone calls or looking for someone to run over and unlock the doors. Perhaps a small group needs the heater turned on for a Bible study during a time nothing else is going on.



With just one screen, church leaders can have the capability to control not only sound and lighting, but also video, security and climate every day that activities are happening in the church.

The touch-screen access person can turn on the heat straight from the church office, on or off site. The number of people with access varies by churches, according to their needs and member technical experience.

With a touch panel, your technician can raise the curtains for your Easter presentation and project life-size images on the projection screens, while dimming the lights on the congregation for a moving performance simply, from one screen, from wherever you want.

From touch panels, one is able to access satellite radio and go on the Internet. Your sound technician can program satellite Christian worship stations to be playing during fellowship time.

Save time and money on printing by making all your signage digital. Place screens in outdoor fellowship areas with your church's core values listed on them. Use the screens just to say, "Welcome" to your visitors or direct them to appropriate rooms.

The events page from your Web site can be presented on projector screens in the sanctuary or television screens in the hallways. You can program different images or even Christian music videos at different

times of the day, depending on what's going on in the building.

Along with these capabilities, any rooms or areas around the church property can be viewed and programmed from one location. By selecting the security button, you can observe various classrooms or hallways, entrances and exits.

The beauty of this system is that a team of audio engineers and consultants customize each element for your church's needs. For example, they will work with you to decide the climate of each room for certain times, so your facilities manager and workers do not have to physically turn on the thermostats a few hours early before actual people arrive to heat or cool the rooms appropriately. The consultants can actually install hidden remote sensors into the walls to manage the most comfortable temperatures.

Valley Christian Center Foursquare Church in Fresno, Calif., uses a similar system specifically for climate control. Administrative Pastor Ed Graveline notes, "You can always override certain choices, and as long as you can do that, the system serves you and you're not serving the system. It makes sense economically for us to use this type of technology to serve our church."

He explains that aside from cost benefits, they have also noticed a greater level of comfort for the people. "If there are 600 bodies in a room, all of a sudden the room gets too hot too quickly. We're able to plan for that in advance."

A representative from touch-panel manufacturer, Crestron, based in Rockleigh, N.J., notes that for churches with high ceilings, heating and air-conditioning can be costly. Their designers suggest integrating both ceiling fans and HVAC into the touch-panel system in these cases. This makes the energy more efficient while keeping it cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

Nonetheless, the touch-panel system does not become manageable until you hire the appropriate experts to design, install and manage the service, which calls for some higher costs if your church is already built. They take a great deal of time to carefully and intelligently assess the individual ministries according to their lighting, audio, video, and other technological needs.



The sound booth and the main worship center at Valley Christian Center Foursquare Church in Fresno, Calif., feature the new touch-screen technology.

It's no secret that integrating multimedia and the latest technological advances into church services has become imperative to reaching younger generations.

Next, a complex system is designed and installed, made up of audio distribution processors, amplifiers, video distribution switchers, room solution boxes and other control panels so that the end result is a user-friendly system specially created for your particular church.

To design, install and integrate the system, it requires at the very minimum, \$10,000. Thus, it is ideal to consider making your church "smart" while you are in the design build process.

In that manner, you are able to control the costs by designing the system into the building as the actual facility. However, there are several elements of the system, which can be easily integrated into an established facility.

Audio Integrator Contractor, David Barrios Designs, based in Fresno, Calif., uses touch panels by Crestron as the center point of his designs.



The touch-panel design allows all of your controls to be at your fingertips.

Whether the church is small or large, he recognizes that the overall "feel" of a worship center has a great deal to do with ambiance generated by creative lighting, temperature and overall aesthetics. This often unconscious awareness must also be cost-effective and simplistic to control. Owner Operator David Barrios sees an array of advantages for churches because the end result becomes so functional.

Above all, Barrios believes that no church should have to sacrifice successful delivery of its message.

"Just because you have a church that isn't 3,000-5,000 seats does not mean you cannot afford a great infrastructure for your growing technology needs," he says. "Don't look for what you think you can afford; look for what is right for your church."

General Manager and Senior Design Consultant for Custom Sounds Designs Inc. (CSD), Doug Hood asserts that the ease of operation is especially appealing to teams of volunteers who may not have experience with audio or video systems. However, he reminds church leaders, "the success or failure of a church sound system during a live service is directly affected by how much or how little the sound system operator is involved."

"A church service is a living, breathing experience," he says. "The sound system operator must stay alert and attentive, anticipating and reacting to various things that happen during the service."

It's no secret that integrating multimedia and the latest technological advances into church services has become imperative to reaching younger generations. They are inundated with hi-tech services everywhere else and youth pastors will tell you that church should be no exception.

You can conclude, however, that if successful businesses and entertainment venues are fully accustomed to these services, adults everywhere are already well aware of these types of advantages. A "smart" church is in fact a realistic option for churches today.

Moreover, the church is able to address several age groups with multimedia techniques, not just the youth who has grown up with it in the last 10 years of existence.

According to Pew Internet Research, "22 percent of Americans 65 and older use the Internet. The percent of seniors who go online has jumped by 47 percent between 2000 and 2004."

If your goal is to get the right message to the right people, it is imperative to look at the technological services that best suit the people in your church today and the people in your church's future.

Look at the usability of options like touch panel systems for your church as a tool to enhance the gifts and serve the needs of the members in your congregation. ❖

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