



THORBURN ASSOCIATES

ACOUSTIC AND AUDIOVISUAL CONSULTANTS

eNEWSLETTER May 2004

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1. Greetings

Welcome to the May 2004 issue of our eNEWSLETTER. Technology in Retail is a re-emerging issue as the economy continues to revive so we are using it as the theme of this issue. The next few weeks should keep all of us busy: first is the InfoComm Conference and Trade Show in Atlanta, followed by the annual AIA National Conference in Chicago.

InfoComm '04, one of the largest AV Industry conferences and tradeshow, is June 5 to 11 in Atlanta, Georgia. InfoComm's renowned InfoComm Academy Conference, with the invaluable assistance of ICIA's Professional Education and Training Committee, has streamlined tracks for the over 100 seminars and workshops provided at this year's show. Reflecting the growing need to focus workshops on who you are or your business or technology interest, attendees will be able to sort through sessions by various industry disciplines (design, staging/rental, sales, systems integration, or technology manager) or by technology (audio, control, display/projection, networking/IP, signal distribution, video, conferencing or streaming). The conference also offers business-oriented sessions to help owners and managers address the challenges of competition and organization for today's environment. At the time of this writing there are still openings in the following sessions led by Thorburn Associates.

- **Facilities Design for Universities, June 5-7, 2004 (Three Days)**
- **Project Management, June 8, 2004 (All Day)**
- **Defining the Perfect Teaching Station for Colleges and Universities, June 9 (2 Hours)**
- **Advanced Acoustics, June 10, 2004 (2 Hours)**

Find our more at: <http://infocomm04.expoexchange.com> - See you there!

As always if you have an idea, question, suggestion please drop us a note at TA@TA-Inc.com for general information or eNews@TA-Inc.com for specific comments about our eNEWSLETTER.

2. www.AVProjectManagement.org

A new web site for the Audio Visual Industry is now active. AVProjectManagement.org was designed specifically for audiovisual design, engineering and installation professionals. The site contains forums, information bulletin boards on products, problems and solutions as well as tips, tricks and ways to work faster, more consistently and profitably. Most information available on Project Management is geared towards larger, multi-million dollar projects, not the smaller projects that the Audio Visual industry is involved in. These resources assume that a project manager is only involved in one, or at most two, projects at a time and has support staff available to help manage and track the various parts of the project. In the audiovisual industry, project managers often have 15 to 30 active projects at one time. We need a resource, such as the AVProjectManagement.org forum, where we can get advice from others in our industry that are facing similar challenges on a daily basis.

In addition to the forum, the site includes a regular column where visitors can ask questions about the human side of project management. The "Ask Bill" section is hosted by Bill Sharer, CTS, Exxel Management and Marketing.



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Corporate Office:
Regional Office:
Regional Office

Castro Valley, California
Burbank, California
Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

Tel: 510-886-7826
Tel: 818-569-0234
Tel: 919-463-9995

Here readers can find the answers to such nitty gritty questions as “Is going to a trade show really an employee reward?”

Other items included in this site are daily headline news articles on current happening in technology and audiovisual sectors, links to just about any company involved in the AV industry, press releases and updates from AV manufacturers and industry companies, as well as a library section with book reviews, definitions for common industry terminology, article reprints and other resources.

This is a site every AV industry professional (as well as other design professionals) will want to bookmark and visit on a regular basis!

3. Retail Audio

Have you ever noticed the plasma screens and TV monitors greeting you when you are shopping in your local Bloomingdale’s or Eddie Bauer? Have you heard the dance-club-like sound systems in the Junior’s departments at Macy’s or in Old Navy? All of these uses of audio and video technology are to make the shopping experience more tailored to you personally, and are part of the explosion of digital signage.

In the times of the westbound wagon trains, general stores in each town carried all of the supplies needed to homestead and run a business, from foodstuffs to broom handles to guns and ammunition. If you lived in that town, the shopkeeper knew your name and that you liked licorice whips and had a horse with a penchant for limp carrots.

Fast forward... Specialty stores became the shopping mainstay, not replacing the general store, but taking a bite out of the general store’s business. Each proprietor, be it butcher, baker or candlestick maker, knew your name and the name of your kids. Personal attention was the way of doing good business.

Zap ahead further and those specialty stores came under one roof in the form of shopping malls. One-stop shopping for all your needs, whims and desires! The downside being that with all of the additional foot traffic, the personal touch with the shopper was lost. No one knew your name or even cared.

Now, many retailers are using audio and video technologies to help enhance and tailor the shopping experience. Customized content based on location and demographics is being delivered to customers using displays and devices once thought only available to NASA Mission Control: video walls and plasma displays. Demand for high quality audio, propagated by the widespread use of home theater sound systems, has encouraged the use of better quality distributed background music systems and, in many stores, high-end foreground music systems. The Internet and technology revolution of the past two decades has also placed MTV, DVD, MP3, and DSS into many homes in the United States.

Sound, like lighting and other visual stimuli, evokes emotion and can define an environment. The music and sounds in a retail store or restaurant, along with the visual design, set the mood and create a comfortable environment for customers and employees. Many retailers, like Starbucks, Bloomingdale’s and Macy’s have discovered that they can increase the amount of time a customer spends in a store or restaurant, and in turn increase sales, by enhancing their environment with a high quality sound system.

To determine a retailer’s needs some points need to be clarified: How are music and other sound elements currently used in the business environment? Will the system primarily be used for paging and announcements? Is a quiet background music or louder foreground music system desired? What are the goals to be achieved from the experience?

A foreground music system might be more appropriate to create a high-energy environment for customers under age 25. However, if the store appeals to an older age group a background music system that creates a more pleasant environment may be the right fit. The function of the sound system, and of course budget, will dictate the equipment required to meet those needs.



The sound system's performance is also affected by the acoustics of the space. A highly reverberant space with hard surfaces that reflect sound (for example a cosmetics area in a department store) requires special attention to lessen the impact of the sound system on customer transactions. In a department with carpeting and soft goods, attention needs to be paid to the absorption of sound, as there is not much reflection from textiles, clothing, and other soft surfaces. Spaces like this may require additional loudspeakers to provide "even" coverage and sufficient volume.

As with all technology systems, the true success of a "Retail Media System" begins with understanding the system goals and objectives as well as the target audience and then designing the space and the technology. Running down to the local stereo shop and picking up a pair of loudspeakers and monitor does not meet the quality many shoppers have come to expect, and even demand.

4. Restaurant Acoustics

During the last 20 years we have seen a number of different acoustical issues in retail / shopping areas – everything from blender noise for a juice bar at a now defunct Mexican restaurant chain prototype, to a restaurant so loud that guests had to shout to hear their dining partners, to the "noise" from a 15-dollar loudspeaker pointed into the mall.

However, when we analyze the issues, it always boils down to one or more of these core items: Room Acoustics, Sound Isolation, or Noise Control.

The "loud" restaurant is sometimes a design goal (or so they state). The owner wants the high-energy feel of activity in the space, but at what cost? How often do you go back to a restaurant if you cannot carry on a conversation at your table? Or you leave with a headache that lasts two days? The other extreme is the restaurant that is too "quiet" where you not only hear but also understand the conversations of everyone around you. From our point of view, the "perfect" environment, is somewhere between these two extremes and meets the goals and objectives of the owner. The selection of room finishes and table / booth arrangement is just one of the many design components that must be addressed.

Kitchen noise is another challenge. What is the best way to keep the food preparation process noise from reaching the guest? Can we put a barrier or maze at the entrance to the kitchen? How is this addressed in an open or demonstration kitchen? Also, in an open or demonstration kitchen we not only have the food preparation noise we also have the fume hood noise to address.

Fan noise and other equipment noise is typically not an issue for us when we work on retail or restaurant projects. We really need to look at the noise from entertainment systems. For example, the background music in a 50's burger joint might not be what people want to hear in the mall's main stage area, especially when Santa or the Easter Bunny is in town for pictures. "Johnny Be Good" and "Frosty the Snowman" just do not mix.

While "location, location, location" is the mantra of many restaurant / retail owners – the acoustics of the space often play a bigger role than many clients realize!

5. Historical Temple Goes Retail

When built in 1912, the Moorish-style Medinah Temple was a meeting place for the Shrine of North America. After a 21st century, multi-million dollar restoration and renovation, the historic building at 600 N. Wabash Ave., in Chicago's River North area, looks much the same as the City's natives remember. It blends the original Arabian - influenced exterior architecture, complete with replicated copper-clad onion domes, with the modern shopping conveniences of a Bloomingdale's Home Store.

The Bloomingdale's Home Store features four stories of home apparel, kitchen appliances and furniture merchandise. The store design called for demolishing the building's interior, and inserting a soaring new multi-story atrium, surrounded by open display space, capped by the building's distinctive interior coffered plaster dome restored within the network of ornate ceiling beams and coves. Because of its historic designation, the ceiling posed



unusual challenges in the design and installation process. Thorburn Associates developed an effective, although unorthodox solution that allowed background music and paging capabilities without penetrations into the historic ceiling. The design located loudspeakers on top of tall retail sales racks and pointed the loudspeakers up to the historical plaster ceiling. By reflecting sound off the ceiling the patrons are washed in a very uniform sound field. The results were better than expected.

The project has garnered many awards, including the Chicago Landmark Award for excellence, American Institute of Architects Chicago honors, Best of 2003 by Preservation Online and the 2004 Superior Award in Design & Imaging Grand Prize sponsored by the International Council of Shopping Centers and *Retail Traffic* magazine.

That's impressive for a building that was slated for demolition and listed as "a most endangered landmark" by the World Monuments Fund.

6. *Another Neat New Loudspeaker*

Part of the solution for the Bloomingdale's Medinah Temple Home Store was finding a loudspeaker that sounded good, but had a small "form factor". We had previously used TOA's H-1 loudspeaker for pew back audio systems in churches and for sound masking systems. It was a natural fit for the Home Store.

The H Series Interior Design loudspeaker is an example of TOA's innovative approach to commercial loudspeaker design. The unique, stylish appearance and superb sound quality of the three models, the H-1, H-2 and H-2WP, provide an alternative to conventional wall and ceiling-mount loudspeakers. The H Series Minimum Reflection design significantly reduces sound wave reflections and the resulting sound coloration that occurs with conventional bracket-mounted "box" type loudspeakers.

Wall or ceiling-mount installation is fast and easy using standard electrical boxes, and you can rotate and aim the loudspeaker components without altering the enclosure's external appearance. Each H Series loudspeaker has a paintable grille and features a high quality "Ferrofluidcooled dome tweeter", "Neodymium woofer", 70.7/100 V matching transformer and removable terminal block. It is one more tool in the toolbox.

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