

Clever design transforms health club into meeting space

Despite our economy's ups and downs, there are still some companies finding that smart marketing and solid service can pay off handsomely.

Such is the case for Novatoo Audio Visual and their client the Alberto-Culver Company, both based in west suburban Chicago.

Alberto-Culver is the consumer products powerhouse that makes and markets TRESemme, Nexxus, Alberto VO5, St. Ives and Mrs. Dash. Their innovative marketing strategy has proven so successful that they have been forced to convert their largest meeting spaces into offices to house new employees. That's not to say they've scaled back on large meetings—for example an annual employee meeting held every January—but instead they've found ways to convert other spaces to meeting rooms on an as-needed basis.

Last year they turned to Novatoo to help them outfit the basketball court in their fitness center for use as an auditorium.

Novatoo's Santo DiBenardo designed a system with three 10,000-lumen Sanyo projectors, three 10' x 15' motorized projection screens and the switchers and cabling needed to run video, audio and computer images to six other conference rooms on the office campus plus a WebEx server. The server allows them to offer two-way communica-



Alberto-Culver's health club, set up for the firm's annual meeting. At right, Alberto-Culver and Novatoo staff operate the systems in the club's AV control room.



tions to meeting participants around the world.

Two days before the annual meeting, Alberto-Culver staff installed temporary carpeting over the court's hardwood floors, set up roughly 400 chairs and lowered the projectors and screens from protective housings built into the ceiling. Novatoo also brought in, on a rental basis, the additional gear and technician-operators needed to help Alberto-Culver staff stage the presentations and broadcast them to employees not able to fit into the remodeled space.

Rental and integration

According to Al White, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor for Alberto-

Culver, it was Novatoo's ability to offer both staging and AV integration services that helped them build a long-term relationship.

"I've been working with John Toomey for eight or nine years," says White, "and I've been a customer of his at Novatoo since he [and partner Tim Novak] started the company. They have been first class in serving us, and if I call them on the drop of a dime they'll come through for us."

For example, White says, "We had to stage a major event in December with only two days warning. I asked John and Tim if they could take care of it, and they got it done."

For the fitness center project, White needed a company that could install

the components that they would use most frequently, yet was able to rent and operate pieces that they might use only annually or on a one-time basis.

"There's a full AV console here," White explains. "We have the capability to show DVD and VHS and record either one. There's an amplifier bank, mixing console, multiple computer inputs and five wireless mics—the full 9 yards. We also have the ability to broadcast worldwide through WebEx."

DiBenardo and a Novatoo crew installed all of this gear permanently, as well as the cabling to six smaller conference rooms used for overflow seating at larger meetings.

"We use wireless mics and a big preview monitor," White explains, "because our presenters like to walk among the people." That's why he wanted a professional camera operator – to make sure he could follow the moving presenters smoothly. "We also had Novatoo add some lighting. This was a morning meeting, and with the eastern exposure of our windows, we have to be prepared to keep the lighting balanced."

White says he's very pleased with the work this year by Novatoo's integration and staging groups. "The permanent system is set up really nicely," he says. "And the rental went very smoothly as well. Customer service is rule number one with them—which of course it needs to be in their line of work, but not everyone seems to feel that way."

According to Toomey and DiBenardo, it's this emphasis on service which has brought Novatoo these kinds of large, sophisticated projects and a loyal customer base after only five years of operations.

White agrees. "They have been a great group to work with."



Setting up for the annual meeting. Note the control room at the back left.



The equipment rack plus a switcher Novatoo added for the annual meeting.



Santo DiBenardo adjusting the audio mix.