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# Demystifying Audio-Visual The Spotlight's On Planners To Deliver Perfect Presentations

By Rick Bloom

Audio-visual technology can be a scary tangle of terminology and equipment if you don't know your way around. We are surrounded — some might say engulfed — by technology every day. And AV is no different than any other discipline; once you become more familiar with it, the less daunting it will be.

No matter what size an event or conference may be, there is one guideline for any presentation in any setting: Someone has a message that is intended to be seen and heard. Because of the vital role of technology and presentations in meetings and events, your goal must be to make sure that the message is clearly received by the intended audience.

Here is an overview of the most common equipment and applications used today and tips for using and understanding them.

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## Basic Meeting Environment

Site inspections are critical in knowing how a room will lay out for the best viewing and listening by the audience. If you can't be there in person, ask for actual photos of room setups with AV set the same as your requirements. Determine sight lines for screen(s), projector and sound placement, podium location, best panel discussion area, lighting considerations during the event hours and seating arrangements. Get a to-scale room drawing to save time and money, especially for setup crews.

**Projectors:** There are dozens of good manufacturers of LCD (liquid crystal display) and DLP (digital light processing) projectors. Order equipment with professional advice based on the number of attendees, screen size(s) and the amount of ambient light that will be present.

As audience size or client requirements grow, you may have to consider the need for projectors with higher lumens (brighter), additional power, special lenses, rigging and a skilled projectionist.

**Computers:** Usually, a computer will be needed to display presentations. You may encounter Macs or PCs, and software such as PowerPoint (a Microsoft product), Keynote (a program written for Apple computers) or any number of portable document format files (PDFs). All of them will run as long as the software is loaded onto the computer.

**Video:** A simple rule of thumb is to use professional-grade equipment if you want professional results. Check video formats in advance to be sure that they will play in the selected machinery.

**Audio:** Have the proper audio speaker system for the size of the audience, including mixing boards, equalization accessories, microphones and an experienced technician. Some meetings will require a technician to be present to operate multiple microphones or change audio sources during a presentation; others will not. Recording is another matter because the type of recording you make depends on what it will be used for in the future.

**Lighting:** Be sure that the presenter can be seen by everyone in the room. A minimal amount of lighting should be present (especially if you are video recording) so that the presenter may see his or her notes and that there are no visual distractions on the presentation area.

**Power:** AV equipment requires a clean power source to run all electrical equipment. Proper voltage can mean the difference between "hum" bars or clear images on your video screens, or extra hiss and noise from your audio system, or voltage surges because lights are on the same circuit. Rent a generator if an electrician determines that neither a clean power source nor enough power is available. Don't leave this decision until the day of your event.

Some properties may waive power fees as long as you use their in-house AV supplier which, for some events, can be very cost-effective. Ask.

**Scenic and staging:** Consider simple and inexpensive scenic additions such as pipe and drape

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behind the presenter and panel; uplighting on drape or walls; sponsor signage or logos on hard surfaces; messages or logos projected through gobos (plates with patterns cut into them that fit between the lamp and the lens); and foliage. These options also apply to large conferences, meetings and special events. It's a matter of scale, complexity and budget. Attendees do remember the little touches!

**Labor:** Get local labor rules in writing to avoid surprises on the final bill. Ask about local union overtime, meal penalties or extra labor charges for holidays (including load-in and load-out days).

**Broadband:** AV technology and Information Technology (IT) are forever linked. The "AV/IT Convergence" has been brought to the forefront of presentation conversations in the meetings industry. There is no "rule of thumb" for what authority in any facility controls access and pricing for broadband service (Internet). Be sure to know the rates and liabilities beforehand. Find the contact who knows the most about the broadband infrastructure and get 24-hour access to them in case there are problems or changes.

**Resources:** Formulate an AV checklist. To get started, go to [rbav.com](http://rbav.com) where you will find glossaries that can help demystify terminology. Or simply Google terms or equipment you don't understand.

### **Final Notes**

With certain exceptions, you may be able to bring in your own outside preferred AV vendor. If there is a vendor on property, invite them to bid. Occasionally, there are charges involved with using an outside production company. AV support that is determined by convenience (on-property) or price alone is not necessarily the best solution. Allocate a little time during your next event setup to watch and ask questions. The more you know, the more appropriate and cost effective this important part of your meetings and events will be. **C&IT**