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SCN at ISE 2014: Is the Laptop Disappearing from AV?

By Kirsten Nelson 2/11/2014

"What have you seen that's cool at the show?" This tradeshow inquiry always makes my brain freeze. Suddenly all I can think about is the booth number I've just memorized to get to this meeting, and I look down at the carpet beneath my feet to look for an answer. That usually doesn't help. But give me a little bit of time to process the heaps of information I've recorded in my analog notebooks, and I'll be able to share my impressions with you.

The most prominent and obvious trends at ISE 2014 were these: GIGANTIC and INVISIBLE. Firstly, when the show closed in Amsterdam on Thursday, February 6, it was confirmed that attendance exceeded 51,000, a number that rose 15 percent on the 2013 event. Yes, you read that correctly. And I will personally attest to the fact that the crowds were positively tremendous at this show. I had to retrieve my long-disused CES navigation skills to make my way through the 12 halls of exhibits. Business is up, people. And it's up from Malaysia to Scotland.

"I haven't seen a show in years where every area rep was as energized as they were at ISE," said Mark Flanagan, vice president of marketing for installation and tour at TC Group. Markets are on an uptick globally, and the enthusiasm for opportunity was reflected in the high-level conversations exchanged everywhere at ISE. "It's an international show, so there's no 'home turf'—no single market dominates the conversation," Flanagan observed. "I would say it's THE best show I've attended."

Next year's show will also be tremendous from the look of it. Space rebooking generated its highest-ever figure with total exhibit space booked onsite for ISE 2015 measuring 33,450 net square meters, a 10 percent increase on an equivalent figure one year ago. That's already 93 percent of the floor area of ISE 2014 locked in for next year.

As for the "invisible" trend, there were a multitude of occasions on which I heard the phrase, "so laptops will just disappear," or "so you won't need to bring your laptop." This goes beyond the mere notion that mobile devices are replacing clunky portable computing options and points to a trend of AV stepping in where laptops leave off. That's right, we're now more important to the road warrior, educator, corporate professional or any human who needs to share data and collaborate around it.

Oh, there was one more variation on the theme: "It's like having a laptop without a laptop," said Wesley Sutliff, at Media Vision while showing me the action-packed new Taiden 8300 Series Multimedia Congress Terminal. Taiden and Media Vision had to evolve their product to keep up with the needs of the United Nations and other

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discussion-centric customers. Hence the new capacitive screen on the device alludes to the iPad interface, but also enables seamless document and high-res video sharing. It was actually one of most future-oriented interface-driven devices I saw at the show. Multimedia Congress Terminals offer more than meets the eye, AV friends. Pay attention and "push to talk".

Sutliff elaborated, BYOD isn't just troublesome because of network stability and support, it's also a practice prone to human error. Forget your laptop and the meeting has to be cancelled. And if one of today's tech-savvy youths gets hold of your device and makes some clever software adjustments or deletes files, you may be bringing your own disaster.

The shiny new concept of huddle rooms (sure wish we had even just one of these spaces in our overcrowded New York office) also saw its fair share of new laptop-free devices at ISE. Vaddio's Huddle Station was built so that "everything you can do with a laptop can be done in the meeting room," according to Vaddio's Hailey Klein. "It's all about your software and your apps and what you want to do." Similarly, the Vaddio Base Station offers another huddle setup without the external speakers.

Based on these trends, business is booming while technology shifts information from the little laptop screen and onto audio, video, and networking gear. You're going to be at the center of this huddle when AV becomes less an add-on than the even more essential platform that enables communication.

Watch this space for more analysis of the ISE show and the business trends that I detected between huddles there.

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