

A change is on the way

Enterprise AV will move from decentralisation to standardisation, from hardware to software, and from fixed to recurring fees. QSC has the operating system to help integrators flourish in this changing future, says *Lindsey Reynolds*.

»» “Change is coming to AV,” says TJ Adams, director of installed systems product management at QSC.

What corporate customers want and need is changing and in turn this drives how the technology itself is applied, according to Adams, who is responsible for all of QSC’s installed systems products on the Q-SYS Platform.

QSC has grown from its audio-focused business roots. “Corporate AV is a massive opportunity for us,” says Adams, who joined QSC because of its radically new technology approach, with the meeting room the key target.

Adams says AV is becoming part of IT in an enterprise but that convergence goes deeper than the network alone. Corporations need AV to function not only as part of the IT infrastructure but also to be built using the same techniques, standards and protocols with which IT is familiar.

AV works in boxes; IT works in applications - so build AV for IT, Adams says. You no longer need to make single hardware boxes, each doing a single specialist job, when you do everything at the software level.

“Our DSP might look like a normal DSP, but it’s actually a computer,” says Adams. “That’s because QSC has built the Q-SYS Platform – an operating system environment built on an open and IT-friendly ecosystem that allows QSC and its corporate users to do AV the IT way.”

In today’s meeting rooms, AV is typically decentralised. Every room across the enterprise does its own thing and integrates a mix of different hardware solutions from different manufacturers - all supported locally, often with as many as five or six software packages to manage the devices in a single room.

Technology in the enterprise needs to be standardised by room type so it can be deployed,



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managed and supported efficiently. IT has built its infrastructure around this standardised approach. Building AV systems in the same way makes the AV as deployable,

manageable and supportable as the rest of the IT infrastructure.

Now AV is a strategic pillar of IT’s value proposition for large enterprises, the inefficiencies of



Q-SYS enables users to write software to provide the same functionality that is typically achieved with standalone hardware

the older AV practice are becoming evident, says Adams. “How we as manufacturers deliver AV needs to change. It’s a major opportunity for us. The corporate market is a huge sector crossing many verticals but its requirement to standardise and provide centralise management and deployment is the same regardless of meeting room.”

QSC’s radical rethinking of the AV as a software environment, where applications not boxes matter, may be breaking the mould, but it is just the start of a predictable process of evolution, says Adams.

“We’ve already seen the death of the hardware codecs in video conferencing with software-based video conferencing now the norm. This is just the beginning of AV’s transition from hardware to software. It’s not often you’re able to know the future in advance, but we can see AV following the same path as IT did some years ago.”

“AV may be playing catch up, but Q-SYS is leading the way,” says Adams. “It is really an

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TJ Adams, QSC

operating system for which we can write software to provide the same functionality that is typically achieved with standalone hardware.”

Adams says QSC wants to be a one-stop shop for corporate customers’ audio, video and control processing needs in meeting rooms and beyond. Its approach also brings them benefits in improved cost of ownership, flexibility and future scalability. “We launched Q-SYS in 2008 and every software update is backwards-compatible and will continue to be so as long as the

legacy hardware allows,” Adams adds.

QSC’s strategy results in a different business model, with implications for its integrator partners. Just as in IT, integrators face the challenge of moving from a fixed to recurring revenue model.

“We want to bring our partners along with us,” says Adams. “We’ll learn together and teach each other how to be strategic partners to our new IT customer.”

Adams is confident that integrators are recognising changing demand. “Larger corporations want a solution that is easy to deploy and that just works, not just fancy features. IT also wants to manage its own systems and not rely wholly on an integrator for every change or feature addition as they become available.

“You could call it the consumerisation of the meeting space,” Adams comments. “Users can walk in and use it like they would use a phone.

“Such standardisation may be

foreign to some in AV but it is what IT professionals are used to and savvy integrators and consultants are already getting involved with enterprise end users to help lead this effort. They have to be able to deploy at scale and speed and then manage those rooms centrally.”

The way ahead for enterprise AV buyers is not to focus on price or features, Adams says. It is to spend time choosing a platform that will easily integrate into their infrastructure and be extensible for future flexibility.

Adams believes the future for QSC and other manufacturers should be to think like their IT buyers and focus on delivering solutions that make sense to them. In addition, there is a need to maintain AV’s strengths as an industry. “AV still has a specific skill set,” Adams says. “Colour depth, acoustics, balanced analogue connections, etc. IT is not likely to be experts in these things and these are valuable and valued skills to bring to the corporate market.” ■