

September 2016



Deploying and Managing a Global AV Environment

Information and insight into choosing the right approach for your organization

This study is sponsored by:



The Reality of Global AV Today

For many (if not most) companies, the increasingly global nature of their business has increased their dependency on their audio visual (AV) environment – in some cases exponentially.

For most companies, going “global” means more meetings involving more people working in more locations serving more customers in more places around the world. As a part of conducting global business, users have come to expect easy access to high performance audio-visual tools and systems. But in many companies, these expectations have not been met.

To paraphrase Forest Gump, AV is like a box of chocolates ... you never know what you’re going to get. While this “wait and see what happens” notion may work well for a box of sweets, it does not work well with core business tools. Enterprise users must know exactly what is and is not possible, and how to access these tools. Consistency is a key part of a successful AV meeting room environment.

Yet a lack of consistency is commonplace in many large companies. Sometimes AV room inconsistency happens naturally over time as more rooms are built in more locations (or by different integrators). Sometimes the inconsistency happens by design as local folks follow a policy of, “this is how we do it here.” In other cases, the inconsistency is the result of one or more acquisitions or mergers.

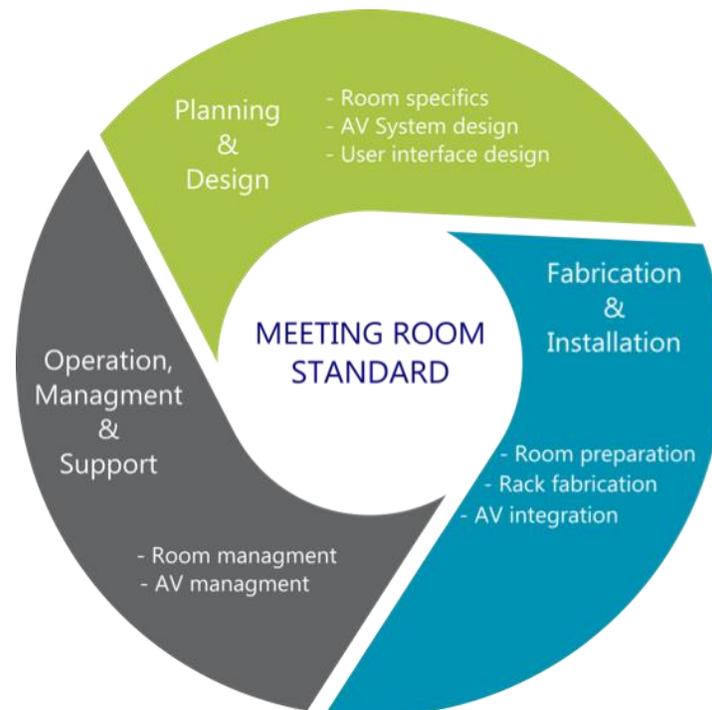
Regardless of the cause, in many organizations each location or even each room has its own look, feel, workflow, booking process, and even support methodology. For end-users, this makes it hard to find and book a suitable room, and often even harder to operate the room. For support people, an inconsistent environment is harder to monitor, manage, and support. For procurement, inconsistency means having to manage more vendors, a compromised negotiating position, and a vastly more complex CapEx and OpEx budgeting.

The takeaway here is that a de-centralized, non-standardized global AV environment impacts the users, the support team, and the company’s productivity.

Start with Standardization

The first part of creating a consistent and manageable global AV environment is to define a global AV standard. After many years of assisting large enterprises in this area, Wainhouse Research (WR) has noted a great deal of confusion in this area.

Detailed information about defining a global AV standard is beyond the scope of this document. However, it is vital for organizations to understand that a global AV standard is more than just a friendly agreement to use a particular vendor or type of video system or display. A properly defined global AV meeting room standard should consider the entire AV life cycle including:



In addition, the global AV standard must be strict enough to create the required level of global consistency, yet flexible and broad enough to address local issues and concerns.

For the purpose of this document, we will assume that your organization has already researched and documented its AV needs, has started to or has already defined its global AV standard, and is now ready to deploy (or remediate and re-deploy) its global AV environment.

Key Elements of a Global AV Environment

From a 10,000 foot view, and assuming that a global AV standard has already been defined, deploying and managing a global AV environment involves the following elements:

Global AV Management Team – involves the creation of a team of resources accountable for the global AV estate including:

- Stewardship of the global AV standard to ensure global conformity and that appropriate updates are made over time to address changing user requirements.
- Management of all internal (employees) and external (contractors, consultants, etc.) resources involved in the global AV environment.
- Management of the AV production environment including defining the AV department's service level agreement (SLA), ensuring the technical success of all meetings and sessions held in all AV meeting spaces, responding to client requests for support, providing end-user training, etc.
- Management and coordination of all global AV projects including the selection of contractors, awarding of bids, supervision of all contractor work, approval of final deliverables, hand-off of completed projects to operations, interfacing with procurement, etc.
- Management and coordination of all aspects of global AV support including the global AV help desk, help desk tools, testing procedures, service level agreements, and more.
- Management of the global AV budget including capital investments (e.g. new systems, system upgrades, centralized tools and infrastructure) and operational expenses (e.g. internal staff, external staff, service and support costs, professional services, etc.).
- Ongoing management of the overall AV environment including short, medium, and long-term planning, ongoing cost improvements, and ability to support increasing volume in the future.

AV Engineering – focuses on the technical aspects of the global AV environment including:

- Defining specific design principles and nuances within the global AV standard
- Reviewing and processing requests to deviate from the global standard
- Selecting and supporting centralized AV infrastructure (scheduling and monitoring systems, etc.)
- Resolving technical issues that cannot be addressed by first-line (operations) resources
- Identifying and testing of new features and technologies
- Creating of test and troubleshooting procedures, etc.

AV System Fabrication and Installation – involves the building and integration of the various pieces of technology and systems to be used within the global AV meeting spaces. This specifically includes:

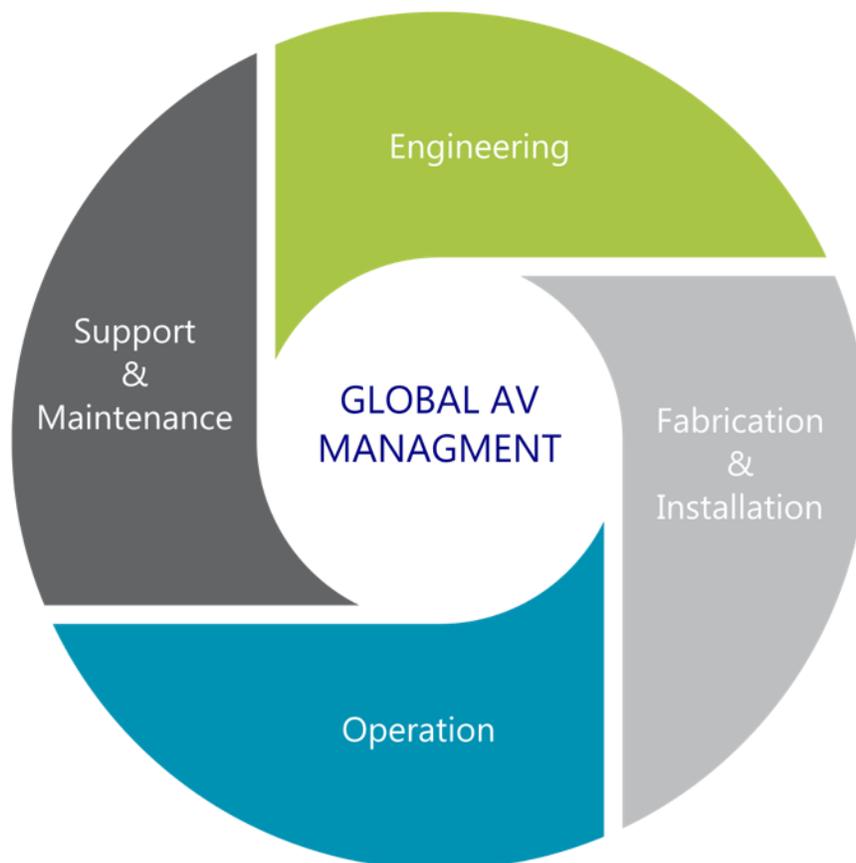
- Creating the detailed system AV flow diagrams
- Installing and connecting the AV equipment within equipment racks
- Programming all control systems and configuring all configurable devices as required
- Completing detailed system testing – both red-line (connection) testing and functionality testing
- Installing the AV system within the meeting space
- Presenting the system to the end-user representatives
- Resolving any remaining open items / punch lists
- Training the users on the operation and ongoing support / management of the system

AV Operations – involves the ongoing management and ownership of the AV production environment (meaning the actual AV meetings as they happen each and every day) including:

- Ensuring that the performance of the overall AV environment adheres to the service level agreement (SLA) defined by management
- Enabling users to conduct scheduled and ad-hoc AV meetings as required
- Supporting end-user requests for help finding and scheduling AV meetings
- Conducting ongoing system / room checks to ensure that all AV meeting spaces are “up and running” and ready to support user meetings at any time
- Responding to end-user requests for support during AV meetings as quickly as possible in an effort to avoid meeting delays.
- Providing system training to help end-users understand the features, functions, and benefits offered by the global AV estate
- Documenting, tracking, and resolving all open issues in a timely manner - either with internal resources or a combination of internal and external resources
- Receiving new or remediated AV spaces and technology as they become available from the internal projects team or from external contractors
- Meeting with end-users to ensure that the requirements for specific meetings are fully understood and that end-user expectations are properly managed
- Hosting recurring account management meetings with key end-users to ensure that needs are being addressed properly by the AV environment and support staff and to solicit feedback.

AV Support and Maintenance – focuses on maintaining the AV systems and technology within the AV meeting rooms including:

- Managing and coordinating efforts to resolve all reported issues or problems
- Conducting proper troubleshooting to verify issues and identify root cause
- Remediating issues quickly by replacing or repairing defective equipment or items, updating system programming, etc.
- Tracking repeat issues to discover ongoing issues and root cause information
- Reporting issue status on an ongoing basis to all involved parties (AV team, end-users, involved contractors, etc.)
- Ensuring that remediation activities are quickly to support SLAs and cost-effectively to minimize spend and adhere to the global AV budget.



Top-Level Approaches for a Global AV Environment

A successful global AV environment depends on the involvement of experienced, trained, and dedicated professionals. However, most end-user organizations are not focused on creating, managing, and supporting AV equipment and spaces. Pharmaceuticals focus on developing and selling drugs. Investment banks focus on managing the financial assets of their clients. Legal firms focus on protecting the legal rights and interests of their clients. Real estate firms focus on buying, selling, and managing properties for their clients. And so on.

It is commonplace for organizations to outsource areas not core to their business. Examples include car service, food service, and security; all areas in which trained staff leverage specific knowledge, expertise, and/or equipment to provide a specific service or perform a specific function.

Allowing others to manage and provide these types of functions is smart business as it allows an organization to focus on what it does best. This same business management practice applies to the audio visual environment. The real question is which AV disciplines should be outsourced, and to which degree, to maximize performance and cost-effectiveness, while simultaneously minimizing risk.

Based on our experience having supported the global AV efforts of numerous large enterprises, WR believes there are three basic options available to enterprises today.

Approach #1 – Insource Entire Environment

This approach requires the creation of a large team of professionals who design, operate, manage maintain, and support the global AV estate.

PRO / ADVANTAGE	CON / DISADVANTAGE
Granular control of entire AV environment from system design to user interface and more	Must hire, manage, and train AV-knowledgeable workforce (engineers, programmers, install / repair techs, in-room support staff, etc.
Ability to define support procedures and service level agreements (SLAs) to smallest detail	Must create and manage a 24/7 AV support team
	Must manage production environment every day on a global basis

Essentially, organizations following this approach are creating an internal AV design, build, and support company that has only one client – their own firm. By contrast, AV integrators build a very similar organization, but are able to leverage those investments in people, knowledge, and technology to support a wide array of clients.

For most organizations, the cost and burden of creating an internal AV company outweigh the control and customization benefits of this approach. And even if specific areas of the operation are outsourced (e.g. the use of AV technicians from various local AV integrators), the organization still shoulders the burden of managing and coordinating the efforts of those resources.

Approach #2 – Internal Management Augmented by External Resources

This approach involves the creation of a team of professionals responsible for managing and coordinating all aspects of the global AV estate. In this case, however, the internal AV team is comprised of mainly management-level resources (e.g. business managers, project managers, etc.) who govern and oversee the efforts of third-party (external) resources such as:

- Strategic advisors focused on identifying requirements and outlining suitable options
- AV designers / consultants to define and update the global AV standard to address user needs
- AV integrators handling room-specific system design, system fabrication, and integration
- AV support technicians responsible for receiving and handling support calls
- Other staff as required (e.g. AV engineers to design custom systems or address complex needs)

PRO / ADVANTAGE	CON / DISADVANTAGE
Company can avoid hiring, training, and directly managing AV resources	Internal team still owns burden of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - managing the overall environment - defining and managing operational policies - coordinating efforts of external AV resources

Approach #3 – Internal Management of a Single Entity

This is a derivative of #2 above and involves the insertion of a service provider between the internal AV management team and the rest of the AV support team on the org chart. The chosen service provider then takes full responsibility for acting on the orders given by the AV management team including:

- Finalizing and documenting the global AV standard.
- Managing the AV design, build, and remediation efforts for new rooms and to bring existing systems in line with the global AV standard.
- Providing global AV support services including a centralized help desk, defining and implementing support processes and procedures, and reporting on open issues.
- Other items as appropriate (e.g. asset management, end-user training, etc.).

PRO / ADVANTAGE	CON / DISADVANTAGE
Allows customer to outsource responsibility of environment to a single team of AV professionals	Requires certain degree of trust in the provider
Allows customer to define the entire AV service (AV standards to use, level of service to be provided, systems to be remediated, and more)	May or may not reduce cost
Allows customer to benefit from experience the AV service provider gained supporting other companies	

In effect, the customer is paying for access to the provider’s brain trust and management experience – not just its “feet on the street” as was the case with the prior approaches.

So Which Approach Makes the Most Sense?

In the ideal world, most companies would follow #3 – at least to some degree - as it offers the benefits of an experienced AV management team and access to global AV resources, without the headache of global AV management.

So why are most global organizations still operating somewhere between approach #1 (all internal) and #2 (internal brain-trust with external workers) today? Based on our experience supporting many global enterprises, WR believe there are four key reasons:

Reason #1 – Lack of Centralized Decision Making and Budgeting

It is very difficult, if not impossible, for an organization to hire a single provider to manage its entire global AV environment if the AV estate is owned and managed by multiple people and departments. This lack of centralized authority has kept many organizations from improving its AV environment.

Reason #2 – Lack of Standardization

A proper outsourcing arrangement requires that all involved parties (customer and vendor) have a full understanding of the work to be performed and amounts to be paid.

In a non-standardized AV environment, it is extremely difficult for a vendor to gain the knowledge needed to accurately define the scope of work. So unless the vendor performs a detailed (expensive, time consuming) assessment of every single AV space, entering into such an agreement is far too risky for most AV firms.

To compensate for the risk, the AV vendors tend to increase the price or require massive system upgrades to create a standardized environment. In the end, the proposed agreement is often too expensive with too many exceptions to be of interest to the customer.

Reason #3 – Lack of a Truly Global AV Provider

Even organizations with centralized AV authority and a somewhat standardized AV environment still have to find a qualified global AV provider. The good news is that there are many strong AV integrators and AV service providers in the marketplace. Some have a strong in-country footprint. Others have a presence in several countries or even on several continents.

However, there are no AV integrators with a truly global footprint, and the global IT providers typically outsource AV-specific work to others.

Reason #4 – History of Failed Attempts

Some organizations have tried to outsource challenging aspects of their environment (e.g. global AV help desk), often with less than stellar results. However, in most cases the companies outsourced a problem instead of working to solve that problem. Outsourcing a headache does not make it go away.

Overall, WR believes that organizations with centralized AV authority and a proper global AV standard should consider outsourcing as much of their AV environment as possible to AV experts, and instead invest their time on their core business value.

Solution Spotlight

The sponsor of this study, AVMI, is an audio visual, video conferencing, and digital media systems integrator with a roster of more than 400 employees (including 200 engineers) and offices throughout the UK (headquarters), the US, and Hong Kong.

In many ways, AVMI is a typical AV integrator offering AV system design, integration, and support services for large and small organizations across many different industries.

Approximately two years ago while working on a global AV project for a large bank, AVMI started development of “Streamline,” a service offering that allows Clients to:

- Create their own Global AV standard using pre-existing and customizable templates
- Define a catalog of standardized and modular AV solutions for deployment on a global basis
- Purchase specific service items (e.g. system design, help desk, etc.) from a global price book
- Follow and audit the status of each service instance (e.g. installation of a new system, closure of support tickets, etc.) via an online dashboard
- Centralize AV purchasing and create global pricing agreements with key technology vendors
- Leverage existing technology, policies, and other intellectual property (e.g. best practices) that AVMI has developed for all of its customers
- Outsource the day-to-day management of the global AV environment, from project management and system design to the daily production schedule, to a single provider

As shown in the graphic below, the Streamline Services portfolio includes catalog management, project preparation, build management, and system support, each of which help standardize the AV meeting room environment.



Catalogue Management

Catalogue Management allows you to define and choose standardised modular solutions, as well as generates price books and BoMs. This allows for a consistent, resilient global approach, with no need for upfront capital investment if you use AVMI's existing catalogues.



Project Preparation

Project Preparation makes it easy to capture project data and apply the catalogue solutions to each shared workspace requirement, allowing project participants to follow the process online, and making data available for future applications.



Build Management

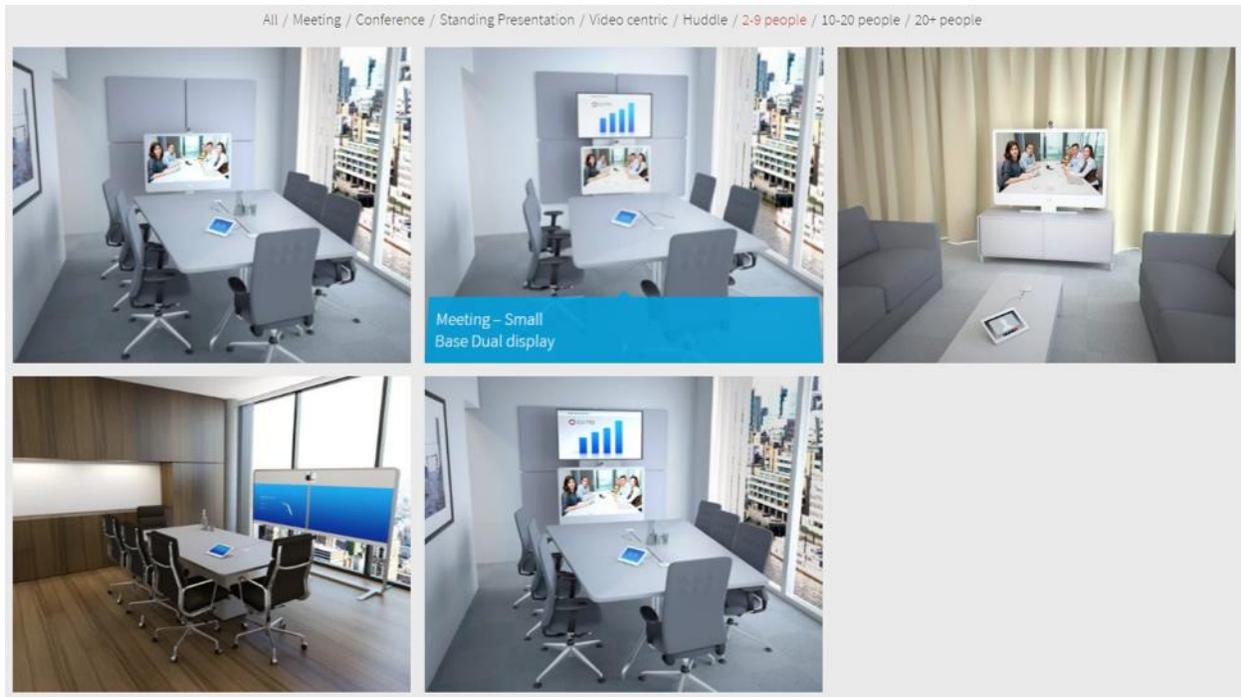
Build Management supports centralised and consistent project planning, system provisioning and quality assurance. It also helps to coordinate the various third-party suppliers throughout the project lifecycle.



System Support

System Support offers everything ranging from basic service desk support with engineer to site supervision, to over-the-network monitoring & alerting with remote control capabilities. This facilitates efficient management of local support resources to reduce costs, increase uptime and provides valuable management data for future projects.

For example, AVMI customers can define a standard AV room catalog accessible to their global users (the screenshot below shows the five options within the 2- 9 person category). Note that this particular catalog includes single (top left) and dual screen traditional meeting rooms with both large (bottom middle) and small (top middle) screen options, a “casual” meeting space design (top right) with a single screen on a credenza, and a video-centric room design (bottom left) providing a telepresence-like immersive experience.



Each scenario includes various options (as appropriate). For example, selecting the large dual screen meeting room scenario provides the user with information about the system (e.g. equipment in use, specific features supported) and the ability to configure the system to address specific needs (see screenshot below). The on-screen image changes automatically as different options are selected.



AVMI room scenarios offer customers the benefits and flexibility of a custom solution, with the cost, simplicity, fast time to benefits, and field-proven performance of a standard “off the shelf” solution such as AVMI’s pre-designed catalog focused on Cisco products (see screen shots above).

AVMI’s customer portal and project management engines offer similar insight and transparency into the global AV environment. And notably, AVMI’s engine even allows clients to solicit bids from other AV integrators for equipment purchases and system integration. In such a situation, AVMI maintains accountability for the overall environment and partners with / manages the efforts of the other integrator.

In a word – WR would categorize AVMI’s process and management systems as “exceptional.”

Conclusion

Large and small enterprises around the world have come to understand the strategic and competitive importance of their audio visual environment. However, with few exceptions, most companies have yet to properly tame the global AV beast. Instead, end-users in these organizations receive a level of service that varies greatly by location, type of meeting, room, etc.

Consistency is a key part of a successful AV service. The first steps toward achieving a consistent AV estate are the centralization of AV decision making authority, followed by the creation and adoption of a global AV standard.

Once the global AV standard is in place, the organization must focus on the following key elements necessary for a successful global AV service: the Global AV management team, AV Engineering, AV System Fabrication and Installation, AV Operations, and AV Support and Maintenance.

Like any core technology discipline, the AV environment requires the involvement of experienced, trained, and dedicated professionals. Enterprises can access those resources in several different ways including:

- Hiring all required staff directly (the insourcing approach)
- Hiring core management personnel only and augmenting that team with external resources
- Hiring core management personnel only and hiring a single service provider to manage the overall AV environment

In the ideal world, most companies would follow the third option as it allows the customer to enjoy the benefits of an experienced AV team without the headache of day-to-day global AV management.

The sponsor of this study, AVMI, offers a service called “Streamline” that simplifies and streamlines many aspects of creating, deploying, and managing a global AV environment – and it does so without sacrificing transparency for the customer.

WR believes services that focus on the creation and embracing of standards, like AVMI’s Streamline service, will play an increasingly important role in global AV environments in the future.

About the Authors



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About Wainhouse Research



Wainhouse Research, www.wainhouse.com, is an independent analyst firm that focuses on critical issues in the Unified Communications and Collaboration (UC&C). The company conducts multi-client and custom research studies, consults with end users on key implementation issues, publishes white papers and market statistics, and delivers public and private seminars as well as speaker presentations at industry group meetings.

About AVMI

(copy provided by AVMI)



AVMI is a leading provider of audio visual, video conferencing and digital media solutions. Our firm's approach focuses on the creation and adoption of AV standards for use on a global basis.

Our global AV management service is powered by Streamline – a new service that allows companies to design, deliver, and support standardized meeting spaces that can be deployed in a scalable, consistent, and reliable manner. Our online management platform also offers clients unparalleled transparency into our operations and our management of their AV environment.

Streamline is led by a specialist project team operating out of our three regional offices in London, New York, and Hong Kong.

For more information about AVMI, please visit <http://www.avmi.com/streamline/streamline>.