

Getting Back to Basics with Church A/V Technology

By Bill Klaber

“Why does it have to be so difficult? I’m not an engineer; I’m a worship leader!” This is a common complaint that is heard when new technology is introduced to churches. To be sure, there will always be a learning curve, but even at that, all of the diverse technology being employed in a typical sanctuary can be overwhelming to those who are in charge of worship.

Much of today’s technology employs independent operating platforms that require time to learn or experience to operate them properly. Integrating all systems to work together often becomes a nightmare or is impossible to achieve.

Music management and planning software has terrific functionality, but in the end, it takes considerable time to get everything ready and then someone still needs to print and bind the music. The ability to add songs in real time during the course of a service because the pastor has changed his sermon topic or because there are other songs that fit the moment isn’t even an option.

Congregational display software requires time to find the proper version of the songs being performed by the praise team and the correct biblical text being used by the pastor. In addition, coordinating video and picture backgrounds, adding text and lyrics in the proper sequence, and interfacing with the projection equipment requires additional time and effort. All the while, the worship pastor or tech leader is wondering where the time went.

From an audio standpoint, setting personal monitor mixes that satisfy the team can be a major challenge, as well. Some members may wish to hear more bass, while others would prefer that certain instrument volumes be raised or lowered, or they just want to hear more of themselves.

With some of the monitoring systems on the market, it’s a fine line that needs to be followed to reach a consensus mix. The sound distortion battles that take place between stage monitors, the house feed and neutralizing “hot zones” to satisfy the congregation if in-ear monitoring isn’t being utilized on stage are also problems that present themselves. This causes worship leaders to use more of their efforts in non-musical areas and adds a frustration factor, especially for the non-tech leader.

These are but a few of the many weekly issues faced in worship ministry. And yet, even with all of the technology available, the ability to communicate back and forth from the front of the

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sanctuary to the tech booth without shouting or hand signals leaves worship and tech teams wondering when it all will be tied together.

Studies show that it takes anywhere from 4 to 16 hours each week just to prepare music for services. When the additional time spent coordinating non-musical issues is added in, it can cause a very stressful situation and leave little time for personal worship preparation. It is little wonder that many worship and tech team leaders are eager for change and are searching for integrated systems that make the tech side of their jobs easier to manage and coordinate. It's a call to get back to the basics.

Fortunately, there are some manufacturers that have recognized the need to simplify things by forging key partnerships with other worship technology providers. In the past, manufacturers were focused only on their own products and product usage, but consumer frustration and demands for simple, basic solutions to manage the growing technologies they faced opened their eyes to the vast possibilities of developing a way to tie it all together. They found that in order to bring a relevant product to a relevant market, collaboration is a major priority.

With one system as the backbone instead of multiple independent systems requiring multiple and sometimes duplicated efforts on the part of the worship and tech teams, a simplified operating program was developed. This solution integrates music management and planning, a central music database that allows immediate playlist changes during the service, a congregational display interface that syncs playlist changes for immediate insertion into the program at the tech booth, real-time communication between stage and tech booth, and personal monitor mixing up to 32 channels with up to a possible 256 inputs that allows each musician to save their individual monitor mix for each song. And, that is just the beginning of many changes that are under development through these creative manufacturing partnerships.

Those utilizing this integrated technology and taking advantage of these tech partnerships are reporting that they are reclaiming time spent doing duplicate functions. They are finding that planning and music management can be accomplished from home or anywhere there is Internet access, which eliminates the need for file cabinets, printing, copying, and binding music. With playlist synchronization between music planning and congregational display software, tech teams are no longer placed in the position of scrambling for lyrics when a song has been changed at the last minute. Technology is being simplified, because manufacturers understand that it all has to work together and not independently.

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Technology doesn't have to be a frustrating word for worship and tech teams. Getting back to basics and allowing technology to work for you, rather than you working for it, is allowing worship and tech teams more time to work on the essentials. There is much to shout about as these partnerships gain momentum and everyone ends up on the same page. Making it simpler and providing tools to coordinate all technical aspects involved in worship is what it is ultimately all about.

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