

Facilities Management from A to Z

Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard
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Audio-visual equipment

In the workplace, audio-visual equipment has increased significantly in importance in recent years. The low-tech overhead projector and screen have been superseded by a vast range of multimedia presentation and communication systems requiring specialist knowledge to install, maintain and manage. The increasing sophistication of computer programmes such as Microsoft's PowerPoint means that no meeting is complete without a multimedia presentation that may include sound, pictures and video.

This has affected the design of the meeting room. Built-in screens, projection systems and loudspeakers are now common features. The corporate boardroom now contains sophisticated audio-visual systems that integrate presentation facilities with environmental and lighting controls, access to corporate data systems and teleconferencing functionality. While the cost of such systems still prohibits their installation in every meeting room, the demand for increased capability is high.

The complexity of such systems puts a new demand on the facilities operation, which often needs to collaborate with the corporate IT function. Users and facilities staff need training in the operation and support of the installations. User-friendly operating instructions need to be authored and made available. Visitors need assistance while using the system. Meanwhile, the facilities team may be involved in managing and tracking portable equipment such as laptop projectors and screens, which may be made available on a shared basis

With such wide usage of audio-visual equipment, maintenance and response activities become of serious importance. Managers have become increasingly reliant on presentations as a central element of their meetings, and failure of the equipment can bring everything to a standstill. The need for effective maintenance and testing regimes, the availability of spares and a rapid response service to deal with user error all place a new demand on stretched budgets but are essential to ensure continuity of what has become an essential operating service.

A final area of concern for the facilities manager lies in the attractiveness and portability of modern audio-visual equipment, especially as it can be equally useful in a domestic setting. At best this may lead to individual staff members claiming permanent use of what should be shared resources, which then become unavailable to others. At worst, expensive equipment goes missing or is stolen. Protection of these assets can be achieved through use of motion-sensitive alarms or even use of RFID (radio-frequency identification) technology.

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