

On Delivering Quality Mega Scale AV Projects in India

The **PALM + AV-ICN conference** session witnessed a panel of AV experts, **Prashanth Govindhan, Claron D'souza, Abdul Waheed, and Kapil Thirwani** sit for a dialogue on the evolution of Indian AV industry, how it differs from AV industries in other countries, and how moral is the concept of jugaad in the Indian AV sphere. In this article, read the highlights of the talk.

QUALITY PARADIGM OF MEGA SCALE AV PROJECTS

16:45 PM - 17:30 PM



SPEAKER: PRASHANT GOVINDAN
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SPEAKER: CLARON D'SOUZA
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SPEAKER: KAPIL THIRWANI
Principal Consultant
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SPEAKER: ABDUL WAHEED
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To address the rising significance of AV in the field of technology in the country, PALM + AV-ICN organized a conference session titled, 'Quality Paradigm of Mega Scale AV Projects'. The session witnessed a panel of AV experts, **Prashant Govindhan, Claron D'souza, Abdul Waheed, and Kapil Thirwani** sit for a dialogue on the evolution of Indian AV industry, how it differs from AV industries in other countries, and how moral is the concept of jugaad in the Indian AV sphere. In this article, read the highlights of the talk.

Looking at AV as an Integrated, Multidisciplinary Field

Prashant Govindan: The whole concept of AV integration has changed in the

last couple of decades. When I entered the industry about 18 years ago, people knew what they wanted in terms of functionality of an AV experience, and we would try and deliver a solution in one way or the other.

Things took a turn in the 90s with the arrival of the home theatre systems and Surround Sound became a buzzword. People wanted surround sound in every boardroom. Now, in the last decade or so, we're seeing global paradigms being applied to meeting rooms, corporate spaces, hospitality and pretty much every other application. As AV evolved, so did the technology. Things moved from analog to digital, from basic component-based designs to more hybrid, digital-based designs. That's where the convergence of AV takes place.

AV is now an integrated, multidisciplinary field rather than just audio, video, or



Anil Chopra, Founding Director, PALM + AV-ICN and Smita Rai, Deputy Project Director, PALM + AV-ICN felicitates the panel of AV experts

lighting. We have a very eminent panel here today having between us more than 60-70 years of experience in the field of AV. Would each one of you trace back on your beginnings of your AV journey and take the audience through a roadmap of the AV evolution in India?

The AV Evolution:

Kapil Thirwani: For me, AV started with all-in-one, then it turned into split, and then it became all-in-one again. Technology was defined by companies who brought the technology onto the floor. Whenever we thought about television earlier, the focus would be on the brand. You never knew the technology behind it. But now, we understand technology - what digital audio is, what analog audio is, etc.

Today, when we work on a multistorey residential or commercial structure, we would still start at the basics. Electrical components, the HVAC, which was broken up into multidimensional components, which also included AV, came into play. But today, we're going back to the companies who are sharing data between them and they are coming onto a common platform where they can now cross-reference products between home, studio and commercial devices.

Today, the job has become more difficult with reference to understanding the transfer of data, and how it is talking to the code of the multi-channel audio or video. The most challenging part is to understand the basics and bring it to every matrix. But once you get the basics right, it is a piece of cake from that moment.

The evolution that I can see today is that we're coming back to the all-in-one solution today, because these companies and technologies are help-

ing us arrive at a single global solution.

Clarón D'Souza: We walked into this industry out of passion. There was a time where there weren't many 'brands' available in India, unlike today, where we're spoilt for choice. But back then, we had to make-do with what we had. With the arrival of foreign brands in India, we learnt what each piece of equipment would do. We had a rack full of stuff, and little by little, equipment racks became smaller. Equipment merged. They became very broad in terms of their capability. Different technologies began to emerge in the world of audio, like CobraNet and Dante. Today, every piece of technology is on IoT. What can we expect in the years to come? Frankly, it's a little difficult to predict, but it's going to be great.

Abdul Waheed: Just as Kapil mentioned, earlier, AV was all about box-selling. Now, I believe we've started

box-selling again. Today, a customer buys a display with in-built camera, in-built speaker, in-built microphone, in-built Wi-Fi, in-built wireless presentation as well! Technology is ever evolving, and change is the only constant here. The industry is continuously undergoing a transformation. Every day, new technologies are making their presence felt, but one thing is for sure, all of this is merging into a single solution on a single platform.

If I recall my earlier days, the bosses, the heads, the CEOs of the corporate world would see these devices in their offices, go home and wished to see and experience the same devices there as well. But now I see that their lifestyle is driving the trends. Now, they have a good iPhone, and they want a similar set-up in their corporate space. They have a good smart TV that is capable of wireless presentations, so

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they want to see that in their offices.

Handling The Complexity In AV-IT Convergence

Prashant Govindan: Over the years, we marked a trajectory, from selling devices to selling boxes. But, in all of this, the size of the project, in terms of value, in terms of number of rooms, number of facilities, or applications, has grown in complexity. The need of the hour is to integrate these platforms back to the IT network. It's about interoperability, the ability to handle AV traffic on the IT network while also keeping it secure and this is the challenge!

So, how do we handle complexity in the AV-IT world along with the cultural nuances one encounters, especially in the Indian context in handling the AV-IT convergence, and what are the tools that help us in doing the same with ease and efficiency? How do we delivery quality despite all the afore-mentioned challenges?

Kapil Thirwani: Before COVID, this was an easy job for us. We had designs on our tables, we looked at audio and video separately, we spent time figuring out how to matrix it together, we used to get an IT expert to look at how all of this is going to work together. You cannot think of the AV system or the IT system without thinking of the language of the handshake between the two. Today, everything is IoT.

Following International Standards In Indian AV Projects

Prashant Govindan: Kapil, what do you see in terms of the diversity or the cultural differences when you engage with the customer in India versus somewhere else, like Lebanon?

Kapil Thirwani: They don't try to multitask the way we do. But in India, we try to do so much more than what we're assigned to do. I think that is not a downfall, but it is chopping your own legs.

You cannot have a question about IT when you are going to be talking about security later. I feel when I work with projects internationally, they are very clear in their requirements. So, even though we all make DDRs, it is just on a piece of paper. But there, the DDR is followed to a T, every perspective is taken into consideration, and no one is ashamed of asking for help. That mode of communication where you are on the receiving end and you get little more information, makes you smarter in the next project.

In India, with the advent of big OEMs, their partners, and their international clients, you get to learn a lot, but care has

to be taken that the learning doesn't fizzle out in the quest to multitask. You will be more well-respected when you take a step back and say, 'No, let us just talk about the topic at hand right now'.

Looking At Mega Scale AV Projects With A Trained Eye

Claron D'souza: Nowadays, when we turn towards large-scale projects, there is a lot of cut and paste that goes into across all the domains – the architectural design, the electrical design, the air conditioning design, and even the air conditioning effects – if you don't design your air conditioning system very well and you have rooms that are joined to one another, the people in the first room will possibly hear the meeting happening in the third room. We have to point this out to the concerned teams. There is a lot of responsibility that we shoulder. What do you think, Kapil? You must face these issues while designing for acoustics, right?

Kapil Thirwani: There is some cut and paste. But every project has a different challenge. But if you have your basics right, then I don't think it will be an issue. I think all of us who are in the industry because of passion, we have our nuts and bolts in the right place.

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Abdul Waheed: AV projects are very challenging at times. When you go onsite, the IT guy raises his hand and says, "I don't know what these people do." In the same way, the HVAC team doesn't know what you do, and on and on. So, when you go onsite, you are not just an AV professional. You also have to perform PMC and coordination to train and explain the architect what kind of acoustics, what kind of equipment, what kind of finishes he requires. So it is both very interesting and challenging at the same time.

Abdul Waheed: One of the biggest challenges for the execution of large projects is the lack of skilled manpower. You don't have formal education for it. So, it is a huge challenge to acquire professional, skilled manpower for large scale AV projects. But, at the end of the

day, you have to be on top of it all. The AV-ICN expo conducts the CAVS course, where formal education is given, and attendees are certified.

Is Jugaad Possible In Large-Scale AV Projects?

Prashant Govindan: I think it's fair to say that every project starts with a good design. If that design is not done well, then you will have a lot of trouble with correction and cost correction to handle going forward. This is one of the key things that is ignored in projects in India, which brings me to an interesting topic – Jugaad. This is one thing that never works in AV. I just want to take the panel's point of view on where they have encountered jugaad, and why that is unacceptable, and if it is the vice-ver-

sa, then why should it be an innovative jugaad.

Claron D'souza: Jugaad was something we had to do back in the day. Now, thankfully, companies have global standards, and you have to follow them. It is very important for us, in this industry, to make sure that everything is connected well. I think when we make provisions in a project, we have to make ample provisions, because as technology progresses, we don't need to do a jugaad later.

Abdul Waheed: For jugaad, I would say, India is a cost-driven market. Many times, we have a proper solution in place, but here, the client's expectation is of a BMW, and the budget is of Maruti 800. This is a common scenario here. So many times, integrators are forced to do jugaad. Of course, it is not right and specially in large projects, you cannot afford to do this.

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Dialing it up: Ashish Saksena on how Monitor Mixing.... (Continued from page 15)

that they turn to mush. Because of this, the musician is not able to hear his mix correctly, and he'll keep asking you to increase the gain. My solution? Be a little more responsible, spend a little more money, and buy something that will last a little longer."

Mastering The Art of Monitor Mixing

The first step to master the art of monitor mixing is switching to stereo. Why? Ashish Saksena responds, "When I did pure monitor mixing, we switched to stereo for all the musicians. The reason behind this was not because we were fascinated with stereo, it's because the placement of the instruments could be done in a better fashion. When you switch to stereo, you can pan the toms away, overheads even more away, therefore creating a little bit of space in the middle for the singer's voice or for the musician's instruments."

A vital element in ensuring a successful monitor mix is tactfully using the snapshot. Expanding on this, Ashish Saksena shares, "A snapshot is very

helpful, not just for changing levels, but also for creating mutes. If you have certain instruments which are not playing in a particular song, you can create snapshots of just the mutes and nothing else. After some time, mixer faders go out of alignment, you think you are at 0, but you are not. You could be at +4 and -6. But when you do it via a snapshot and internally when that fader comes up, the physical representation of the fader may be anywhere, but when you look at the software screen, you know you have reached its correct point."

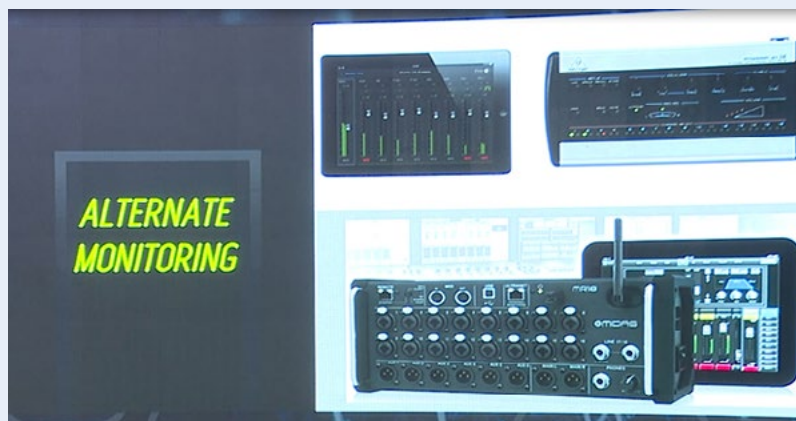
Exploring The Nuances of Alternative Monitoring

For Ashish Saksena, alternative monitoring is very helpful. But what is it, and who does it work best for? Saksena says, "It is ideal for a much bigger band that has a larger tech crew travelling with them. You now have systems where you can sub-group up to 24 channels to send up to 24 submixes to each musician's station and he/she can control their own mixes."

Smaller consoles also deliver agency to musicians, allowing them to control

their mixes. Speaking on smaller consoles as a great alternative monitoring option, Saksena concludes, "Some of the smaller consoles work on WiFi, where everything is app-controlled. If you run a small band or a small setup, and you want to give the musicians control over their own mixes, you can split your setup in a way where you have your console on Front of House and you have a WiFi enabled console on stage. That acts just like your monitor console, but it can be remotely controlled. You can now mix Front of House and the musicians can control their own mixes from a monitor console which is remotely located."

Creating a good monitor mix isn't child's play. But till maestros like Ashish Saksena are here to enlighten emerging sound engineers about making a mark in the live sound industry, the journey is well worth it.



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