

11 Questions with **Marc A. Remond**

APAC President, Kramer AV



*With his core understanding and experience of working in dynamic and fast-paced international environments, **Marc A. Remond**, APAC President, Kramer AV, elucidates his experiences in the pro AV industry to AV-ICN Expo Magazine team, who meets Remond virtually for this exclusive interview. Marc delineates about Kramer's journey in the pro AV industry, its milestones, and the vision to expand the pro AV market. Furthermore, the conversation takes a leap towards analysing the pro AV industry in India and globally in brief.*

Can you talk about your career trajectory in the AV industry and your current role as APAC President at Kramer AV?

I studied international trade and international business practices, including a major in marketing but I wanted to explore the world. I decided to travel to China to learn about the culture and the business environment. After my graduation, I joined a telecommunication company called 'Alcatel'. I was posted in China for channel business with that company. Later, I began working in enterprise communication, marketing, and selling analogue & digital phones. That was very interesting for me because if you remember the early 2000s, that's when Cisco introduced IP telephony for the first time. In fact, in the present day, I find myself in a very similar environment in the Pro AV world as technology is moving from HDMI and HDBaseT to AV-over-IP.

In 2010, I had the opportunity to join one of the video conferencing leaders called Polycom at the time. I took over the role to create awareness about the applications of video beyond the standard meeting along with my team, sharing the benefits of video conferencing beyond the reduction of cost, time, or carbon emissions. Soon after, I ended up leading the entire industry solutions team for the company. Post which I did set up my own business. I began building and marketing room systems including PC-based video conferencing room systems for two years before Barco approached me.

I joined the AV industry with Barco, a Belgian-based company, to transform the go-to-market for a product called Barco ClickShare. I got into the world of wireless presentation and wireless conferencing and helped the company build the distribution and introduce their latest product for two years. Eventually, in 2022, Kramer approached me as they were looking for someone to lead the entire Asia Pacific region. At the time, the company just got acquired by Fortissimo, one of the largest private equity firms in Israel and they wanted to shift the centre of gravity from Israel to other regions. For the past two years, I've been building my regional leadership team at Kramer. We also recently launched our new regional headquarters and executive experience centre to showcase our end-to-end audio and visual experiences. The end goal here is transformation, our focus on improving the go-to-market, bringing new solutions that are transformative and innovative, and managing the change.

Please elaborate on a few major technology milestones in Kramer AV's journey – from inception to date.

Introduced in 1981 by Dr. Kramer, the company is 43 years old now. With the goal to enter the video arena with innovative products, the company acquired a few organizations along the development. For instance, Kramer acquired Sierra Video Systems, which was one of the leading US companies that offered high quality metrics, switches, and routers. Another key milestone was in 2014, when Kramer acquired a Singapore based company called WAL Vision, adding the wireless presentation and collaboration product line to the Kramer portfolio. Two years later, in 2016, Kramer acquired a company called iRul, which was the

first cloud-based control and automation software for both commercial and residential markets for room control and automation cloud base. Later, in 2021, Fortissimo Capital acquired Kramer and Gillard Iran, the new CEO, has been building his leadership team and transforming the organization from a family business to a true multinational company. However, everything accelerated in 2022. Kramer created three regions, where we have three presidents now – for America, EMEA, and Asia Pacific region. Therefore, Kramer aims to shift the centre of gravity from Israel to the regions so that we can empower the people in the field for faster and better decisions, closer to the customers and partners.

Any point in Kramer's history where you created some patent with regards to broadband, or the video integration?

The portfolio we offer today is the result of two key aspects – the acquisition of technology and the result of our R&D efforts. The most current one being Panta Rhei, the next generation audiovisual ecosystem platform. There are a few innovations around cables as well. For instance, when HDMI became popular, it was a consumer product. It came to the residential and consumer world first, but Kramer designed HDMI cable for the Pro AV environment – a high-quality cable using high-quality copper materials while shielding to extend the distance between the source and the display offering 1080p or even 8K resolution today. We've recently completed the same amount of work with USB-C too. Last year, we introduced a new range of USB-C cables that offer 60W of power, 4K, 60V video that gives users the USB services that are needed to connect camera, microphone, and speakers for network access. But of course, there were other innovations around AV signal distribution, switching, and extension over the years as well.

According to Mordor Intelligence, the Professional Audio-Visual Systems market size is estimated at USD 278.57 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach USD 356.88 billion by 2029. The global audiovisual industry is crowded with products and tech-

nologies today that promise to deliver a futuristic experience to the consumers. In your opinion, which technologies will drive this growth in AV?

There is a big influence coming from the consumer market, which forces enterprises to adopt new technologies. For instance, people have never consumed so much video content. The creation of the video content and its consumption has exploded in the past decade. As a result of that, people have certain expectations in terms of audio and video quality when they work or when they collaborate in the enterprise setting. One such example is 4K TVs today. Users are expecting a 4K interactive display in meeting rooms and classrooms. They are using mobile phones and tablets that support USB-C. Therefore, users expect USB-C connectivity in the meeting room nowadays without VGA or HDMI. People have become more demanding in terms of connectivity, seamless access to high quality audio and video content and that is driving a need into different vertical markets, not only in enterprise or education, but also in government, as we also have other video technologies such as CCTV, video streaming over IP, or the command-and-control centres to monitor infrastructure. So, there is a need coming from consumers in terms of high video resolution, new ways to connect into a meeting space or a learning space with video being processed differently for monitoring infrastructure specifically. Therefore, all the demands and innovations in play, lead the organizations to relook at work-spaces, learning spaces, and command-and-control spaces to ensure they have the highest quality possible.

Kramer AV recently launched a single centralized cloud-based platform called Panta Rhei. Can you elaborate applications on the platform and what makes it a game changing solution for the AV industry?

Before we understand about the Kramer Panta Rhei platform, I think it's very important to understand the market trend. At the beginning of this interview, I talked about the move from HDMI, HDBaseT to AV-over-IP. With the AV and IT convergence, we expect all the AV devices to be connected to the network. The signal is also running on the IP infrastructure because of which, it allows the users to connect the network to the cloud to offer additional capabilities. The CIOs want to take that legacy infra-

structure – AV infrastructure and be able to manage it exactly like the rest of their ICT infrastructures and that's where Panta Rhei comes into play. It's an IoT platform for the AV infrastructure.

The Panta Rhei platform caters to the four phases of the AV lifecycle from the design phase to the implementation. Users can upload the designs and prepare spaces and the devices. As a systems integrator, I can create buildings, floors, rooms, the devices per room, based on MAC address, and so on and so forth. Therefore, when it comes to implementation, the platform automatically discovers the devices and allocates them to the spaces based on the MAC address. Furthermore, there's an auto discovery of the devices and it populates the information in the platform automatically, saving a lot of time for the AV managers or systems integrator, helps them avoid the manual work. After the implementation, Panta Rhei can provide services such as monitoring of the devices, checking the health, are they on or off, and even the CPU performance. Users can get alarms, notification, if there is a problem, and even analytics, that will come over time and is supported by Kramer devices as well as non-Kramer devices. The long-term strategy is to integrate with other platforms in the market, such as, building management system, or perhaps, the IT management software that is used to manage the entire IT infrastructure.

Panta Rhei is set to reduce the number of interventions on site. The number of times people have to go on site, either to implement or to troubleshoot, all of that can be done in a centralized manner. In fact, the CIOs expect the AV devices to be rolled out exactly like a laptop that would be connected to the network for all the updates to be pushed automatically by different systems.

Is Panta Rhei being introduced globally in certain markets or in the Indian market as well? Will it be introduced in all different markets together? How is the penetration?

Panta Rhei was announced at Integrated Systems Europe in Barcelona. It's not a product for everybody out there. Users should have a certain AV infrastructure to justify the investment in a platform like this. Panta Rhei can be used with the availability of hundreds of AV devices connected to a network. It's about scale, centralizing the management, and automating the provision amongst many other things.

Panta Rhei is being introduced globally

with a POC phase first, even in India. In fact, we believe that India is a fantastic market for us because of the BPO business. Many organizations have outsourced their IT and their AV to teams located in India. Therefore, a lot of decisions related to centralized management of IT or AV equipment reside in India and our very successful team in India approaches global clients that have BPO operations in India to manage a global AV infrastructure.

Currently, Panta Rhei is cloud-based with a public cloud infrastructure. Therefore, Kramer is mainly targeting enterprises and education sector. In the near future, we aim to have an on-premises version for government customers and enterprise customers that do not want a connection to the cloud but put the platform in their data centre.

India's video conferencing market size, which was estimated at USD 268.7 million by BlueWeave Consulting in 2022 is expected to reach USD 622.5 million by 2029. Which key trends and technologies do you see emerging in the AV market in the next five years to support this growth?

About 10 years ago, only large organizations like foreign companies, very large local organizations like the telecom operators, or large BPO companies would invest in their video conferencing infrastructure. Back in the days, when we talked about MCU's video border proxies, or video endpoints, it was a sizable investment. Nowadays, video conferencing is available as a service. There is a huge adoption of Microsoft Teams Room as well as Zoom Video Conferencing across India. Kramer has also announced a new product line of certified MTR systems, which is a collaboration with Audio Codes. Kramer is bringing MTR Microsoft Teams Room systems to the market, which are cost effective, believing that there is another segment of the market in India that will adopt this kind of dedicated video conferencing units. Even down to the SMB, users can have one meeting room, buy one system and be able to collaborate and communicate with some of the largest MNCs in the world at a minimal investment every month. Therefore, we can say that video conferencing will be more popular because of its afford-

ability.

The video conferencing endpoint market has become a kind of a commodity because every MTR offers the very same user experience. As Kramer, we have ways to augment or improve the meeting experience when using MTR by adding multiple cameras. As a result of that, we can integrate, seal microphones, or add Kramer to control the other devices in a meeting room. So, users can close the curtain or even turn on the lights through the MTR touch panel. We share this functionality of the devices to integrate all the AV components with our MTR portfolio, today.

Currently, which AV industry segment/sector in India is witnessing an unprecedented growth in terms of demand and usage of Kramer technologies, and what role does Kramer's fully equipped service centre in Bangalore and a R&D unit in Delhi play in enabling this growth?

Kramer has been present in India for more than 15 years now, with the largest team located in India and largest market in Asia Pacific. At the early stages, the team decided to focus mainly on local enterprises, education, and government to generate revenue. The team further focused on the Indian companies and large Indian MNCs because the decision is based there. In fact, the technical evaluation is handled in India and that's why we have an office and full operations based out of Bangalore, including an R&D centre in India to support our move to the cloud and software aspects. I do foresee growth in the future because of the infrastructure being built throughout India. So, when a city expands, a subway, railway, or complete infrastructure expands, including the hotel, and that drives the need for more AV solutions into the ballrooms or meeting rooms for command-and-control centres. Therefore, as the country grows and the infrastructure of the country develops, it creates a much larger pro-AV market for everyone.

Do you feel India is a price-sensitive market with regards to Kramer technology? Do you feel there's a resistance factor in adopting when looking for the solutions?

When it comes to selling products, there will always be a cheaper product in India, whether it comes from China or India. The way Kramer has been able to differentiate itself, is by working with the end customers at the early stages on designing an end-to-end solution. So, what customers buy from

Kramer is not a product, it's a full system, a guarantee that the end-to-end solution will work as expected and because of that, the prices are not a major factor. Companies can offer a product that has the same specs at a lower price, but Kramer can design, implement, and support complex systems delivering services that employees or students need. Kramer's team caters to large, complex projects, and therefore, it's less sensitive to price competition overall.

Mainstream companies in India are now calling their employees back to office. Do you feel that a decline in the number of remote jobs might affect the demand for solutions in BYOD/videoconferencing segment?

On the contrary, I believe that as the companies call their employees back to office, it's creating additional demand to equip spaces with video capabilities and collaboration capabilities within the organization. Before the pandemic, everything was happening in a room and those who were connected remotely were neglected. During the lockdown, everybody was connected remotely and there was a kind of equity among people. Now, we are in a hybrid mode. It's very unlikely that every participant will be in the meeting room or classroom now. We will always have someone connected remotely. Therefore, the big focus of organizations today, is how do we ensure that remote participants and on-site participants have the same experience, and this is creating pressure for organizations to have a video conferencing or video collaboration system in every meeting room. We will see a higher adoption or higher rate of video equipment in every meeting room and organization moving forward.

The consultants, AV managers, IT teams, and facilities management team together, need to rethink about the design of the rooms to ensure that the presenter is seen by the remote participants and the remote participants can be heard and seen by people in the room. There's a definite need for change management required in terms of how meeting spaces and learning spaces are designed now.

Do you think India is adopting state-of-the-art technologies in AV today or are we still a step behind in the technology being adopted in the projects that are being executed? Or is it state-of-the-art AV?

I think, it varies as per the industries and

not just in India, but globally. There are some verticals that adopt new technologies before others. As we know, in enterprise market, especially technology companies, they provide software, services, and even sell technology. Therefore, they are normally the first one to try something new or invest in technologies and that's happening in India as well, because of which, we see a rapid move towards USB-C and AV-over-IP in those verticals.

When someone builds a new office, they don't look at HDMI and HDBaseT; they look at AV-over-IP encoders, decoders, and room control and automation because it's much more scalable and flexible for AV signal management. Every encoder becomes an input and output anywhere in the network. We can also see education moving fast and away from HDBaseT and HDMI to invest in or explore AV-over-IP and cloud-based management system.

Kramer is uniquely positioned to provide

end-to-end audio and visual solutions. Using different kinds of technologies, it can be based on HDMI, HDBaseT, AV-over-IP, or even a mix of the three. What is more important is ensuring that the users, whether they are employees in a meeting room or students in the classroom, enjoy the use of a seamless technology. It's all about the user experience, and this is why we get involved in the design of the system to make it as simple as possible for any user to connect, share, and collaborate.