



In picture (L to R): Prashant Govindan, Kuldeep Kamat, Rhythm Arora, and Kelvin Ashby-King from AV-ICN Conference 2024

# FUTURE OF PRO AV MANAGED SERVICES IN INDIA

*Leading one of the fastest-expanding economies around the world, excelling systems integrators, AV consultants, and AV service providers are working to transform the pro AV landscape in India. In this session, moderator - **Prashant Govindan**, Director – India, Generation AV along with panellists **Kuldeep Kamat**, Managing Director, Allwave-AV Systems, **Kelvin Ashby-King**, Principal Consultant, Clarity Consulting, and **Rhythm Arora**, Chief Technical Officer, Qubix Technologies share insights on the pro AV services around the country. Engaging the readers with a deep dive into the pro AV world, this excerpt from AV-ICN Conference and Seminar held at AV-ICN Expo 2024 discusses the key purpose of pro AV in India and its future in the coming years.*

Beginning the session with the simplest question for even the non-technical audience to understand, **Prashant Govindan** opens the discussion: “What is a managed service and how does pro AV work with the managed services?”

Addressing the proposed question, **Kuldeep Kamat** states, “We’ve kind of dabbled in this space ever since the pandemic and have been trying to figure out how technology could change globally. Normally integrators spec for a project and quote based on price or various other factors. However, there is very little thought given to the post-sales service. So, the way I would design a managed service in pro AV space will be based on how you look at the life cycle of the entire project and the refresh timeline. A managed service contract could be along the lines of a leased service, which includes everything like replacement firmware upgrades.”

He adds, “A managed service contract by definition is something which looks

at not just the price and the delivery but the entire up time, product and, project duration of the entire corporate real estate facility from a pro AV perspective. Moreover, speaking of managed services in pro AV, we also have to focus on security, especially in environments like advanced meeting spaces."

Adding to the thoughts of Kamat at the session, Govindan further states, "Security is an essential aspect today and it's important to secure meeting spaces and corporate communications. In fact, it's also necessary to ensure that PA Systems and conference systems do not permeate into someone else's space, leading to invasion of privacy."

## AV in Hospitality

Moving the discussion forward, Govindan puts another question forward to **Rhythm Arora**, "Could you shed some light on the hospitality space booming in India currently and how does a managed AV service assist in that space?"

Rhythm Arora starts by saying, "We were working on a managed service platform last year and post-Covid there was a lot of buzz around it. So, we tried to position up-time as a service model, which means we were not selling the equipment but the up-time. Secondly, we realised that it should be sort of a DSITC system as we cannot provide a managed service on a customers' BOQ. We need to use our BOQ, create the design, and maintain the entire inventory as well. However, understanding all the challenges and requirements in different industries, and coming across various observations, we witnessed that hospitality customers were very excited to deploy projectors, screens, etc. that have a faster refresh cycle."

## Commoditisation or Standardisation of AV

The session moves forward with another relevant question directed towards **Kelvin Ashby-King**, "Do you see the advancing role of managed services as a paradigm shift in the business model and if yes, is that a good thing or are we inching towards the commoditisation of AV?"

Kelvin replies, "I think Covid-19 brought some opportunities for the pro AV industry. I remember when the concept of a meeting room in a box came out but failed dismally at the time. However, keeping the current transitions in mind, I think we're heading towards the phase where

brands like **Crestron** or **Extron** are trying to provide users with the entire AV solution. Therefore, I would say, it has become a commodity and certainly, that is for general meeting rooms, smaller spaces, or huddle rooms."

Kelvin also puts an argument forward on the definition of managed service at the session, "As Kuldip and Rhythm spoke about AMC and service contracts earlier, I think a managed service is where the complete responsibility including network these days has to sit in one person's hands to deliver everything from the top to the end. This is especially happening in midsize companies that don't have large IT departments or the in-house skill. This brings a huge opportunity to offer a design to operate services or as we define it, 'managed services'." He adds, "Corporate AV is transforming with large companies now having their own AV team. Therefore, I think, large scale managed services have still a long way to go in the top end sector. In hospitality, we're going to see a complete dropout of fit of hotels."

Sharing his perspective on the discussion, Kamat argues, "Instead of commoditisation, I would use the word standardisation because we've been fortunate enough as the country to be an arm for many global rollouts like that with PSNI Global Alliance. To me, it doesn't seem to be as commoditised as people think it is." He adds, "If we look at it keeping in mind the Indian pro AV market, I think in the coming days there's a lot of growth opportunity for pro AV managed services."

Ashby-King argues, "I think we've had standardisation for years. Today, an IT company can go and buy from **Poly** or **Samsung** and deliver a room about 85 to 90% similar, but it won't be exactly the same."

Kamat agrees, stating, "Speaking from an integrator's perspective, when we did a 400-room project in Hyderabad, it took a lot of planning to deliver state-of-the-art solutions from post design to the execution, and post-sales support. For such projects, it's essential for systems integrators or the IT providers to have an operating model. Without a successful operating model, the concept of a managed service might not have a seven-year or an eight-year window."

## Industry's Game-Changing AV Solutions

The advanced technologies and innovative solutions leading the current market

are driving the technological changes and the entire industry is getting drawn towards it. Carrying the conversation forward around similar lines, Govindan raises the question for Rhythm, "What's your perception on the technology that's being implemented to enable remote monitoring and remote firmware updates, and how can manufacturers build on this?"

Rhythm replies, "We've been testing a program, which is a combination of API and home-build technology with some hardware wherein every day in the morning, the room restarts and applies self-test. It checks everything where we call the APIs of the UC device, the TV, and everything else. In case, there's a fault, it automatically sends an invite to the calendar, blocks the room so that nobody else can book it for the day, and generates a gate pass for our technicians to get it checked."

Prashant Govindan raises a very interesting conversation, "Is the industry stepping up its game or are the customers requesting the new wave of technology that we can see today?" To this, Kelvin replies, "I think there is still a long way to go within the AV industry in terms of roles and responsibilities, especially with the change from IT industry and it is really dependent on the management software and the upgrade software from individual manufacturers."

## The Role of AI in AV

Speaking of the role of AI in AV, panelists further share ideas on how AI is transforming businesses in the real world. Presenting detailed information on how AI is managing to make our lives easier in terms of an application model, Ashby-King states, "AI can be as simple as continuously looking at echo cancellation and optimizing the echo cancellation with an algorithm for that area. Therefore, AI is going to play a big part in what we're doing, but it will start with small problems."

With the argument raised by Kamat on bespoke AV applications, where software like ChatGPT still require human intelligence to work efficiently and more importantly manage all the manual work, Kelvin continues to comment, "I agree there's certainly going to be an outcome of AI over time. In fact, the understanding of client expectations or even user experiences are not amongst the things that AI can do at this stage, making it efficient for design only as of now."

Keeping the audience engaged, panel-

lists continue to make spot-on discussions on how human intelligence is still needed to feed the right inputs for AI to generate the right output. Rhythm comments, "I always say, we are in the business where rooms talk to rooms, not people talking to people with AV solutions. I think in our foreseeable future, we will still be connected to the physical world. We will still see customers putting two land ports on each desk in case the WiFi fails."

### **Skills and Manpower Requirements in AV**

Keeping the discussion on human intelligence for AI in mind, Govindan initiates another topic on what kind of people do the integrators and manufacturers look for in the pro AV market, and what key skills are required to be a part of the team. To this, Rhythm replies, "There is no formal training for AV available. However, it requires

around one to two years of experience on floor with the understanding to manage real time challenges."

Kamat continues, "The kind of people we look for, are people with a good attitude. We put communication skills a bit lower on the radar because we try to add team members who are willing to work on site as the pro AV industry demands physical presence. In fact, India is relatively young as an economy. Some seven to eight years before that, post liberalization, pro AV industry was vague in terms of future possibilities."

Ashby-King adds to the discussion, stating, "Topping all these requirements, I also look for passion and curiosity to work in the AV industry. I need people who are going to look at problems, find different solutions, and are committed to taking a problem, owning it to a solution."

### **Conclusion**

Prashant Govindan carries the discussions forward with more relevant and engaging questions about traditional AV integration in the digital age. Moreover, the panellists draw their closing comments by sharing advice to the overall integrated community, how they should evaluate end users' requirements, and so much more.

The session became more engaging and interactive at the end, when the audience got up proposing multiple questions for the panellists. Some questions like – Can AI be a threat for managed services community and more, allowed the panellists to respond actively, directing audience towards the relevance of pro AV in the Indian market.

