

AV-ICN CONFERENCE: TALENT CRUNCH IN AV

At this year's *AV-ICN Expo Conference and Seminar*, a dynamic panel came together to address one of the industry's most pressing challenges — the talent crunch. The session, moderated by **Mustafa Rampurawala** (CTS), Head – Projects, SISPL, featured a panel of distinguished voices including **Abdul Waheed**, Managing Director, EYTE Technologies (CTS-I); **Sanjay Dhuria**, Director, Visual Display Solutions; **Rhythm Arora**, CEO, Qubix Technologies; **Nirdosh Aggarwal**, Managing Partner, Hi-Tech Audio & Image LLP; and **Ashish Bajaj**, Director, Enterprise Sales, HARMAN Professional Solutions, India & SAARC. *AV-ICN Expo Magazine* brings readers an excerpt from the session capturing the highlights of this powerful exchange.



INSIDE INDIA'S AV TALENT CRUNCH: HOW INDUSTRY LEADERS ARE BRIDGING THE GAP

An excerpt from AV-ICN Conference and Seminar Session – “Bridging the Skills Gap: Addressing the Talent Crunch in the AV Industry”

Opening the discussion, moderator, **Mustafa Rampurawala** pointed out that despite the AV industry's rapid expansion, the shortage of qualified talent has emerged as a common concern across

OEMs, manufacturers, consultants, system integrators, and distributors alike. He mentioned, "The entire industry is feeling the impact of a talent crunch at all levels." From there, the conversation unfolded into an honest, solution-driven dialogue that highlighted both systemic gaps and hopeful strategies.

Sanjay Dhuria was first to speak, reflecting on how the industry's fast-paced growth hasn't been matched with equal investment in manpower development. He remarked, "AV sector has grown in leaps and bounds, but the relative investment into training and skill-building hasn't kept up. We still lack the kind of infrastructure that IT or engineering streams require like institutes, diploma courses, or even short-term certifications where someone can formally learn AV." He admitted that the industry itself must shoulder some responsibility. "We are waking up to the harsh reality that we don't have enough qualified manpower because, for years, we didn't invest in it," Dhuria added.

LACK OF RECOGNITION AND PATHWAYS

Nirdosh Aggarwal, representing a distributor's perspective, echoed that sentiment. He argued that the AV sector in India has long been under-recognised. "We don't have government colleges, universities, or even certified programs teaching AV," he said. "Until the youth of India start viewing this as a viable career, we'll continue facing this challenge."

Emphasising on the need to build enthusiasm among young professionals, suggesting industry-wide collaboration to create standardised courses and recognition systems, he added, "We all need to come together and build platforms that can train and certify young people as AV experts."

A GLOBAL ISSUE WITH LOCAL GAPS

Abdul Waheed, speaking from a consultant's perspective, broadened the lens, stating, "This isn't just an AV problem. Globally, we see a gap between talent demand and availability. In India, unemployment exists on one side, while on the other, companies can't find skilled candidates." He attributed much of the mismatch to the lack of formal education in AV and the changing mindset of younger generations. Waheed observed, "Gen Z and Gen Alpha see the world differently. They seek balance and growth, but the industry hasn't adapted its structure to attract them."

Waheed proposed a dual approach of advocating with universities for formal AV curricula and simultaneously offering short-term product-neutral training courses to bridge immediate needs. He said, "Manufacturers are already doing product-based training, but we need neutral, industry-wide learning to build real competence."

UPSKILLING THE WORKFORCE

With an expertise to manage high-profile projects in India, **Rhythm Arora** shared a pragmatic approach to navigating the talent shortage. He remarked, "We realised that almost 80% of project work doesn't require AV-trained manpower. So, we started upskilling electricians and technicians from parallel industries – CCTV, access control, and others. The AV industry pays better, and with the right guidance, these professionals quickly adapt." However, he cautioned that the real vacuum lies in design and engineering talent. Arora said, "People don't even know this industry exists as a career option. Most of us landed here by accident. No one grew up wanting to be in AV — we just found our way."

THE OEM PERSPECTIVE: BUILDING PASSION THROUGH TRAINING

For **Ashish Bajaj**, the issue was both structural and cultural in this industry. He said, "Let's be honest – AV doesn't appear in any dropdown menu when someone chooses a career. Most of us are here by accident and by passion."

He further described **HARMAN Professional's** approach of hiring fresh graduates from engineering and management schools and training them extensively, adding, "We've seen great success with this model. Even if some leave for other companies, it still benefits the entire industry."

Bajaj believes OEMs have a responsibility

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to invest selflessly. He said, "If we train people and they move elsewhere, that's OK. It strengthens the ecosystem. We need to create passion for AV — because those who love it, stay."

WHEN QUALITY TAKES A HIT

The discussion then turned toward the real-world consequences of this skills gap. Bajaj pointed out that while revenue growth may continue, the quality of work has suffered. He stated, "Even the best product fails if it's not deployed properly. Fundamentals like wiring, installation, and sound calibration are being lost." Bajaj also observed that many new hires come from IT backgrounds without a foundation in audio-visual principles. "We're hiring people who understand networks but not sound. The basics are disappearing," he added.

Arora further continued that while his company compensates by mixing experienced AV engineers with parallel-industry recruits, the gap in design knowledge remains a concern. "It's not just about execution," he said. "It's about knowing what to design, what to recommend, and how to future-proof a solution."

Waheed also illustrated this point with an example. "A client once refused to buy LED displays after a bad experience," he recounted. "He had been sold the wrong pixel pitch — and what should have been a showcase became a disappointment. That's what happens when people don't understand technology deeply."

RETAINING TALENT BEYOND PAY-CHECKS

Both experts, Aggarwal and Dhuria, emphasised that retaining skilled professionals requires more than salary increments. Aggarwal said, "Money isn't everything. People need appreciation, growth, and a sense of belonging in every industry." Dhuria further elaborated, "Respect is as important as remuneration. Create an environment where people feel valued and have opportunities to grow and even small progress every month will keep them motivated." Bajaj agreed, noting that companies must make learning continuous. "Training, recognition, and global exposure keep people engaged. People stay not just for money, but for culture and growth," he stated.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW WORK-FORCE

Highlighting the significance of the gen-

erational shift, Waheed mentioned, "The new generation values work-life balance and mental well-being. They won't work 15-hour days like we used to. As leaders, we must understand their psychology and mentor them, not just manage them." He suggested, we can incorporate mentorship and mental health programs into company culture as "Retention today is about empathy as much as opportunity."

THE WAY FORWARD: EDUCATION, AWARENESS, AND COLLABORATION

As the discussion rounded off, Ram-purawala invited each panellist to share two key actions to make the AV industry more attractive and sustainable.

Waheed proposed focusing on awareness and education. He said, "We must approach universities, build courses, and create a formal career path."

Dhuria suggested embracing technology and innovation. He mentioned, "Let's use AI to make AV smarter. Why not explore AI-driven system design or training tools?"

Arora emphasised aiming higher, "We

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Audio & Image LLP

keep looking for low-cost technicians. Instead, we should also attract top-tier talent from IITs and IIMs. AV isn't small – it's multi-faceted and deserves recognition."

Bajaj called for shared responsibility among OEMs and integrators. He said, "We already conduct 40 training sessions a year. Let's make it 80. The more we educate, the stronger we become."

Aggarwal concluded with a vision of inspiration. He said, "Young people must aspire to become AV professionals. They should see examples of success in this field — stories that make them proud to join."

A COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT

As the session drew to a close, Ram-purawala proposed forming an industry forum to continue the dialogue online. "If we can create a space for professionals to share questions and solutions, we'll not only address challenges, but we'll build a stronger, united AV community."

The audience responded warmly, many nodding in agreement. What began as a discussion on a skills gap ended as a shared commitment to mentorship, education, and collaboration that will shape the future of India's AV industry.

*To view the entire session, visit
PALM and AV-ICN Expo India's
YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/fVr1ElfOCMY?si=RljwBK7O7CvIGdI3>*