

Large-scale conferencing room wins national award



Stunning conference center offers videoconferences for 170 or more

***Presentations Magazine* calls it one of the nation's top three facilities for 2001**

"This room is a jaw dropper," says Doug White, Audio/Visual Director for First Health in Scottsdale, Arizona, of the company's powerful new conference center. "When I've shown managers its capabilities, I've had them ask, 'are we sure this is an insurance company?'"

Located in Old Town Scottsdale, the new facility includes one of the largest videoconferencing rooms anywhere. The facility, used for training and other staff meetings, is capable of two-way conferencing for up to 170 people in the main room, with overflow viewing for an additional 300 nearby. In addition, it has extraordinary presentation capabilities, with computer, DVD, streaming video, tape, document camera or web sources projected on up to four main screens plus video and audio support for up to 30 presenters on stage. It has production capabilities as well, with meetings originating here webcast world-wide.

No wonder *Presentations Magazine*, in its annual *Best Presentation Rooms* competition, called it one of the top three training rooms or classrooms built in 2001.

And no wonder the area's major hotel chains are lining up to rent the facility to their convention clients. "I think we have at least two events scheduled for each of the next four months and we just opened it up for rental," says White.

But rental revenue is strictly secondary—the room's primary purpose is to provide a base for the many meetings required by the



Above: presenters in First Health's auditorium can control all systems themselves from this podium, or they can rely on technicians working out of an operators' area on the side of the room (shown on the cover).

firm's fast-growing business. First Health is a worldwide leader in comprehensive health care plans for major corporations. The firm has 15 videoconferencing sites across the country, which it uses on a daily basis. Yet no site is as elegant, nor as technologically advanced as the new Scottsdale center.

Designing the system

To build a system that allows a group this large to participate in a videoconference took some careful planning. Joe Stacey, the United Visual account manager in charge of the project, decided to base the system on a Polycom VS4000, which allowed a great deal of flexibility in the use of the cameras, microphones and audio components essential in a room of this size. He and his engineering staff used ultra-bright Panasonic LCD projectors to allow for the very bright lighting crucial for good

pickup from the cameras aimed at the stage. Gated, ceiling-mounted microphones pick up comments from the audience, while up to 30 wireless diplomat mics (plus a podium mic) can handle any combination of presenters or discussion panels.

The wide, semi-circular layout of the room posed special problems for the a/v system. Though the room's wide, relatively shallow design brings audience members in as close as possible to the stage, it means that many of the seats are far beyond the 60-degree cone best for viewing media. To solve that problem, the United Visual crew installed four 6' x 8' screens, each pair angled outward to serve about half of the audience. In addition, they mounted two 34" monitors toward the back of the room. Now First Health presenters have a dual-screen system for videoconferences and the ability to make presenta-



Above and to the right: auditorium from the back, shown with presentation lighting and delegate mics set up. Note the four screens at the front, angled to optimize viewing in the pie-shaped room. Operators' area is visible on the opposite side of the room (below hanging monitors).



tions with side-by-side comparisons of computer or video information. Audience members all have a close, unobstructed view of some very powerful presentations. The result is stunning.

Of course, the complexity of the system can be a bit challenging to the typical presenter. While White and Stacey put a touch panel and commonly-used source equipment in the room's podium, they also included an operators' area at the side of the room with additional equipment and duplicate controls. Though many presenters prefer to operate the system themselves,

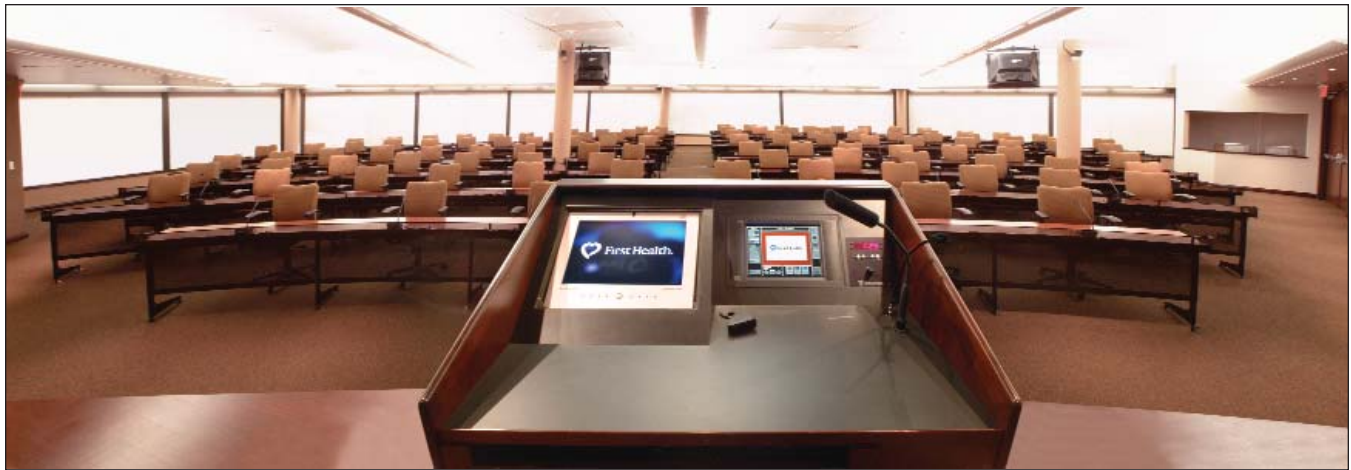
technicians can run the the system for them, following their cues. That's how White produced the room's inaugural Financial Analysts meeting, which was webcast by Yahoo! through the First Health website. "Executives don't want to be messing around with all this equipment while they're making a presentation," White says.

Tight deadlines

First Health's top management gave White and the United Visual crews only two months to complete the conference center before that first meeting. Though workmen finished

just one day before the event, White managed to check out the a/v system while company executives ran through their final rehearsals. Stacey says "we were very glad that everything ran flawlessly, because there wasn't much room for error." Despite the pressure, everything at the meeting went well. "Rich Leonard and Al Salys from United Visual waited all day for something to break down, but nothing ever did," says White. "I never had an installation go so smoothly. You guys are the best."

The conference room has proven itself time and again since that



Above: the auditorium from the front, shown with videoconference lighting. Note the cameras mounted on the posts for pickup of the stage. The lectern contains a PC, wireless mouse pickup, CD/DVD player, VCR and document camera for easy access by the presenter, as well as control touch panel and hookups for a laptop. Note the production booth on the right side of the photo.

At right: multipurpose room shown with airwall open, set up for dining. By tying the projection and sound systems in this room to the auditorium, it can be used for overflow audiences for any kind of meeting.

Lower right: rear projection room behind the auditorium houses two of the projectors.



inaugural meeting. White says the company hasn't even really scratched the surface of how they can use it. "The marketing team can't wait to get their hands on this room."

Sales and marketing meetings, management training and client presentations all benefit from the quiet efficiency of this conference center. Any activities in the main conference room can be broadcast to a multi-purpose room down the hall, which First Health most often uses for meals as well as overflow seating for up to 300 people. This room

can be divided into two separate meeting rooms, each with its own lectern, audio and projection system. It's the perfect complement to the firm's extraordinarily versatile auditorium.

The versatility and technology brought into this conference center means First Health no longer depends on outside vendors, either for equipment rentals or help creating presentations. And with area hotels offering space for only 50 or so people at a time, the conference room fills a serious need in the local convention market, and



promises to be a busy place in the future. "It's hard to believe this was all done on a handshake," says White. "You should definitely get some kind of award for this one."



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