Blowing the Lid Off

Data Collection

Sealed Air Corporation, a global Fortune 500 company leapfrogs others with the ability to gather and easily analyze AV room and system data.

By Cindy Davis

Unless you’ve been duct taped and locked up in a cave for the past 50-odd years, you’ve experienced the simple pleasure of popping Bubble Wrap. The packing material we grew up with became the signature brand of the Sealed Air Corporation, founded in 1960. Today it’s likely that you often encounter a number of the company’s other products from food packaging such as Cryovac, Korrvu—the transparent film that holds products into place on cardboard or similar packaging—and many more.

The company employs approximately 15,000 and serves 122 countries. In 2017 Sealed Air received LEED Gold certification for its new state-of-the-art, global corporate headquarters in Charlotte, NC.

Bradley Wilbanks joined Sealed Air in 2016 as the lead video engineer at the Charlotte campus, and has since become the global IT AV supervisor. Having worked with global financial institutions prior to Sealed Air, Wilbanks was used to overseeing sophisticated videoconferencing and enterprise-wide AV and control systems.

Lacking integrated AV control or equipment, Sealed Air facilities were the antithesis of sophistica-
“Being a global company, one of the biggest things is communication,” Wilbanks said. “We have supply chain leaders and business leaders here in the States that have to communicate with people in South America, Russia, other parts of Europe, and the Asia Pacific, and these conversations are happening at odd hours of the day and night. We kept getting complaints about the quality of the audio during the conference calls.

“At the headquarters in Charlotte we were lucky enough to have Diversified as an integration partner.” The challenge was to figure out what the staff at Sealed Air wanted and needed when they had not previously worked in an integrated AV environment. “Together with Diversified we were able hit the ground running.”

With Diversified, Wilbanks brought in a Crestron Mercury tabletop meeting and collaboration system to A/B test against the current DSP system. “The difference was night and day. The quality difference from an audio standpoint alone with the Mercury sold us on it immediately, and these aren’t small rooms,” Wilbanks said. “We purchased the little mic extender kit they [Crestron] sell that we rarely utilize. It’s just that good.”

The three buildings comprising the new Charlotte HQ campus of this Fortune 500 company would be the envy of any of the top 10. A massive Planar video wall, a 190-inch Prysm touchscreen, more than integrated 100 meeting spaces, training rooms, and a customer engagement center were all huge changes for a company that, for the better part of 50 years, had been run like a mom and pop shop, according to Wilbanks.

Sealed Air standardized on Crestron worldwide. “Across the pond, we’re planning a 10-room customer engagement center south of Paris that will utilize Mercury and some of Crestron’s newer technology,” he said. The Paris site will be completed this November, and a customer engagement center in Milan will go live in February of next year. Charlotte, Paris, and Milan are the three main technology locations. “But we have close to 200 manufacturing plants or supply chain facilities and each one of those has anywhere from one to six conference rooms,” he said. Wilbanks and his team are in the midst of a global outfit in which every meeting

Opened in 2017, Sealed Air’s LEED Gold-certified global headquarters in Charlotte features a wealth of AV assets, including a massive Planar video wall.
space will be deploying Mercury, Crestron’s all-in-one tabletop conferencing and collaboration solution as the global standard. On top of that, Crestron’s Fusion platform handles the facilities’ monitoring, scheduling, and data and reporting.

**GETTING TO THE DATA**

Once the Crestron equipment was installed at the headquarters, “it was important for me to really understand how much power it had, and what it could do,” Wilbanks said. “It was great because I was not only able track how much and what type of utilization we were getting out of each room, but I could even track how many people weren’t showing up to their meetings.”

With occupancy sensors located within each meeting space, Wilbanks was able to start tracking no-shows. “Meetings get canceled, but what we
found was people weren’t releasing a room and 45 percent of the campus was sitting booked but empty,” he said. “Fusion was the breakthrough point for us to really find out how our rooms were being used and how they were being misused.”

Today, if an occupancy sensor isn’t triggered within the first 10 minutes of a scheduled meeting, the room will release itself and become available within the Exchange scheduling software for someone else to locate and book remotely or from the Crestron door-side touchpanel. “Within Fusion, I was able to dig deep and actually find out how many times a month John Smith is booking a meeting and not showing up.

What was really amazing was we started seeing there were a lot of repeat offenders,” Wilbanks said. In addition to spaces being booked and not used, a common pain point at most companies, was two or three people using a conference room designed for a dozen people when they should have used a huddle space.

Using Fusion’s monitoring capabilities, which provide real-time feedback, Wilbanks’ team is able to see if someone is using the HDMI input, mini display input, VGA input, or detect if they’re using the wireless gateway for presentation. This allows for immediate remote troubleshooting, saving time and money by not needing to send AV techs to a meeting space.

In preparing for a Sealed Air technology refresh, Wilbanks was pulling historical usage data from Fusion and noticed that the IPTVs installed in every conference room throughout the campus was the number-one piece of equipment that was failing. “They would lose sync with our multicast, and we had to send a technician to manually reactivate that sync—or if a building lost power, a technician would need to go to every conference room and reboot them.” He estimated that his team was spending 12 to 16 hours every other week just rebooting IPTVs.

“When I started pulling utilization, we realized [IPTVs] are basically getting hit really hard during the Masters golf tournament, during the recent FIFA World Cup, and during Trump’s inauguration,” Wilbanks said. “I could literally go back in history through the data and tell you exactly the days that these things were used, and other than that they are not being utilized.”

This data made it really easy to decide to eliminate the IPTVs from conference rooms. “We’ll leave them in the break rooms, the cafeteria, and general hub areas that we have on each floor in each building, but we’re not going to put them in conference rooms because it’s a waste of time and resources,” he said.

Using Fusion for real-time monitoring and data collection has proven invaluable.

**THE DEVIL’S IN THE DETAILS**

“With Fusion, I talked about all these exciting things I was able to track, but what I didn’t tell you was that I was spending hours mining
Planning out an office space used to be a straightforward task: simply provide enough offices and cubicles for the number of people you employ, and equip them with the necessary computers to do their work. Today’s workplace landscape is much more fluid.

According to AVIXA’s 2018 Market Opportunity Analysis Report (MOAR)—which covers the corporate market and examines the opportunities and challenges for providers of pro AV solutions and technologies—planned capital expenditures among U.S. corporate technology managers is expected to total some $181 billion in 2018. Of this figure, nearly $12 billion is expected to be in AV systems, particularly meeting technologies for conference rooms.

Futuresource Consulting’s recent Corporate End-User Study echoes these findings, pointing to increased investments in collaboration technology. “It is not just about firms blindly investing in the ‘latest and greatest’ when planning meeting room technology, it is much more than that,” said Anthony Brennan, research analyst at Futuresource Consulting. “It is about the blending together of both physical and digital to foster synthesis and innovation in the workspace.”

This trend is no doubt influenced by shift in working patterns: The Futuresource report found that 43 percent of companies surveyed stated that they are investing in technology for meetings held outside of meeting rooms. In addition, respondents stated that 20 percent of meetings are being held in non-traditional areas such as in kitchens, breakout spaces, receptions, and foyers.

Compounding issues further is the ever-increasing rise in remote workers. According to the Futuresource report, 11 percent of surveyed employees work from home three or more days a week, and 32 percent of respondents reported an increase in the average amount of time spent meeting remotely via conferencing technology on a weekly basis.

So, it’s clear that organizations have much to consider when planning a path to upgrades. And, rather than relying on employee surveys to determine the extent to which spaces and technologies are used, it’s best to let the rooms and devices speak for themselves. By implementing management platforms that give insight into the usage of network-connected AV devices, as well as room occupancy systems, companies can make the most of their available space and ensure the equipment provisioned provides the maximum return on investment.

—Matt Pruznick

through Fusion to pull this data out,” Wilbanks said. “I was spending hours trying to figure out how to even create the report. I’d sometimes have to call Crestron and be like, ‘Hey, this is what I’m trying to pull. Can you just help me? How do I get information out of this?’ They were always great to give me that time, but it wasn’t always easy.”

It doesn’t make sense to collect data if you aren’t able to analyze its findings. “I was spending several more hours creating a way that was presentable because in Fusion, you get this X-Y chart and I’m not going to put that in front of my executives, because it’s hard to understand what you’re looking at.” Wilbanks or someone from his team would then spend several more hours using Keynote or Illustrator to create presentations for Sealed Air executives. “It’s great, but by that point, I could’ve just picked up the phone and said, ‘Hey, here’s where we’re at. This is what we’re doing.’”
DATA IN A DASH
Sealed Air was a beta test site for XiO Cloud, Crestron’s cloud-based deployment, management, and monitoring platform that was soft-launched at InfoComm 2017. As Wilbanks recalled, “We had a few people say, ‘Hey, I know you guys are a big Fusion shop. You should check out XiO when you start to pull in the Mercurys. It’ll make your life a lot easier.’”

XiO Cloud was a turning point, according to Wilbanks. During a recent meeting with Sealed Air’s global IT director, Wilbanks was able to present data in a whole new way. “It wasn’t a matter of me pulling [the data] out of XiO. I literally just pulled up XiO and showed him the dashboard. We were able to sit there and look at the data and be able to talk about it, versus me having to stress about if he asks me what I’ve done the last two days—in the past I would have to answer, ‘I’ve been mining this data.’”

From the interactive XiO dashboard, Wilbanks and his team were immediately able to view multiple data points about room and equipment utilization, and the type of activity such as presentation-only, an audio conference, or a USB videoconference through Webex or another third party.

As soon any Crestron Mercury is plugged into the network in a Sealed Air meeting space, it automatically communicates with XiO. “It’s literally there out of the box,” Wilbanks said. “I’m not having to sit here and go through custom programming to verify that this is what I want. It’s just there, plug and play; it’s very simple.”

Wilbanks described an XiO dashboard he was viewing: “I’m looking at the base device usage and I’m able to see that 15 percent of the time, it’s on a SIP-based call, 20 percent of the time it’s on HDMI, and the other 37 percent it’s using AirMedia wireless presentation. I can see the number of hours the device was used for a phone call. I can go into the activity log and see which users have logged in and are using it.” Wilbanks is still in disbelief that no programming was required to make this happen.

“It’s just there. The portal gives me one location where I can see every device. If I want to, I can go into every granular capability the device has in the settings.”

If a Sealed Air executive notices a room is not being utilized, “I’ll pull a summary report, and we’ll sit down and look at it,” he said. “At this point, there’s not a need for custom stuff.”

With this level of data analytics, Sealed Air can easily make informed decisions about future equipment and space planning. “If we see that finance’s conference rooms are not only booked all the time, but they’re used eight hours a day, we’ll need to figure out how to open collaboration spaces or huddle rooms.”

In mid-September this year, Sealed Air made the official decision to go full-on with XiO Cloud and purchased its first licenses. “Now I can actually do more important things like investigate new technologies and look at ways we can utilize our conference rooms to make them more efficient,” Wilbanks said.

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