Integrate

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THE OFFICIAL TRADE JOURNAL OF NSCA | SUMMER 2021

HOW TO MITIGATE Supply Chain Challenges

Don't be victimized by pandemic-related product availability gaps.
Tips from NSCA's Emerging Technologies Committee can empower integrators.
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Inside NSCA's Own Succession Planning Strategy PAGE 44
Cybersecurity: The Reason NSCA Members Sit at the Big Table PAGE 20

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YOUR TRUSTED ADVISOR

4 High-Profile Trends that … *Sneakily* Impact Integrators

Legislative alert: Analyzing the impact of Wayfair, Amazon, Google, and Uber on your integration company.

By Chuck Wilson

It may seem odd to write about Wayfair, Amazon, Google, and Uber influencing systems integrators, but major legislative changes are happening as a result of their impact on the current business climate.

Heading into the post-COVID-19 recovery phase, here are four factors to watch and consider:

1. **Physical presence and proper collection and remittance of sales/usage tax.**
   The 2018 South Dakota vs. Wayfair U.S. Supreme Court ruling didn't seem like it would have anything to do with integrators … but it might. There's always been confusion about how an out-of-state company providing equipment and materials should handle sales tax … and now we add remote managed services to the mix. Many states picked up on this ruling and began "revenue enhancement" measures to collect tax dollars. Clarity is the important thing here: No one wants to go through a sales tax audit. Worse yet is losing a tax audit and being fined. Will sales tax become an even bigger challenge for NSCA members with more regulation and government intervention?

There's always been confusion about how an out-of-state company providing equipment and materials should handle sales tax … and now we add remote managed services to the mix.

2. **Exempt vs. non-exempt status and the correct determination of employees vs. contractors.**
   This has always been a little confusing. The NSCA community uses subcontractors, temporary workers, and labor providers as a normal course of business. Now, layer on the ruling in California about Uber drivers being considered employees. California Proposition 22 and California Assembly Bill 5 (known as the "gig worker bill") have reopened the debate about who is—and isn't—an employee. Relief is temporary, as US HR 6988 momentarily permits digital marketplace companies (Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, Airbnb, etc.) to provide benefits to workers during COVID-19 without actions establishing them as employees or independent contractors or establishing the company

as a joint employer under federal, state, or local laws. This bill applies to digital marketplace companies that provide financial assistance, health benefits, training, health checks, and personal protective equipment to individuals working in such marketplaces from March 15, 2020, through June 30, 2021—or through expiration of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Will the gig economy grow or shrink due to government intervention?

3. **Is Amazon a friend or foe to small businesses?** This global debate started in Europe and made its way into U.S. political and legislative agendas. Amazon captures and monetizes user data to drive future sales; arguably, small businesses can't compete with that. Amazon has been challenged with fair taxation payments; it has leveraged the digital marketplace to have many advantages over traditional brick-and-mortar retail businesses. The FTC is launching several investigations on the M&A activity of Amazon and companies like Facebook and others for using their perceived monopoly to essentially acquire competitors. Will the government's intervention place additional scrutiny on smaller businesses acquiring competitors? Could this impact our industry?

4. **How does anyone compete with Google?** Is this something legislators should be concerned about? And why does nearly every state have a lawsuit against Google? The app store, the ads, the analytics, the monetized accounts: The Sherman Antitrust Act has been on the books for over a century, preventing unfair business practices. Until this past year, people seemingly forgot it existed. Now, several states say that Google is using unfair leverage to convince other online companies to stop selling ad placements or be downgraded in search results. Is that a punishment for being too big … or is that an antitrust violation? Lawmakers have jumped all over this, causing some manufacturers in the channel to re-evaluate how pricing models are structured and how one-off discounts could be scrutinized with heightened awareness of longstanding regulations.

Watch for our regulation and legislative updates—and don't hesitate to reach out if you're unclear about how they might impact your business.

Chuck R. Wilson

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DO YOUR PART

Sign up for legislative alerts by visiting nsca.org/cq-roll-call.

Integrate IN THIS EDITION

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Pivot to Profit 2021 – IN PERSON!

Sept. 21-22 in Atlanta

A lot has changed since the last time the NSCA community gathered for an in-person business conference. You—along with the entire industry—have been through a lot.

We'll talk about all of our challenges and achievements (in person!) at Pivot to Profit 2021 (P2P).

When you reimagine your company's purpose, along with the problems you solve for customers, you may have to "pivot" to discover new growth opportunities. At P2P, learn how to maintain your company's core values and support ever-shifting customer demands while discovering lucrative pathways to increase revenue in today's environment. We'll help you "pivot to profit" by discussing:

- Becoming a managed services provider—even if you're a project-centric company
- What's possible with technology you can access today
- The impact of predictable monthly income and properly recognizing that revenue
- Emerging innovations that could disrupt or enable opportunity—depending on how they're handled
- Development of a predictable, reliable, and profitable managed services business
- What your next competitor might look like (and what your company could become)
- What to do differently to become a trusted advisor for digital-first clients
- Your own list of five ways to drive new revenue

Meanwhile, we can't emphasize enough how excited we are to host an in-person business conference again. It will be great to reconnect with the NSCA community. As *Seinfeld*'s George Costanza might say, "We're back, baby!" Register Now

MORE Pivot to Profit Content!

NSCA's Revenue-Boosting P2P Webinar Series is available on demand. Revenue and cashflow are always extremely important topics for integrators—and even more so as the industry battles market recovery in 2021. Topics include:

- Rebuilding Revenue & Improving Cashflow
- Recurring-Revenue Opportunities for Integrators
- Revenue Opportunities: Adapting to Clients' New Needs

Find NSCA's on-demand content here.

Webinar: Dr. Kuehl's Economic & Market Recovery Update

July 20

Dr. Kuehl has provided NSCA members with economic insight and analysis throughout COVID-19 and market recovery. With the vaccine rollout well under way, mask recommendations evolving, and the re-emergence of customer demand, it's definitely time to check in with Dr. Kuehl again. During this July 20 webinar, Dr. Kuehl joins NSCA CEO Chuck Wilson to provide objective analysis on:

- Supply chain and its impact on integrators
- Talent recruitment trends and obstacles
- The state of different vertical market recoveries
- Return to work
- COVID-19 vaccine rollout
- Consumer behavior

Sponsored by Kramer.

Register Now

NSCA Community Roundtable Discussion: Confronting Supply Chain Concerns

July 13-14

NSCA's Emerging Technologies Committee helps integrators reclaim control of the supply chain. Sponsored by Synnex.

Register Now

Webinar: Forecasting the Rest of 2021

August 10

Discussion of marketing trends and how to close out the year strong. Sponsored by Almo Pro A/V.

Register Now

FIND UPCOMING EVENTS

on our event calendar at NSCA.org.

A TALE OF Two Pandemic Experiences

New research shows that large integrators and small integrators were impacted differently—and at different times—throughout the pandemic.

One important objective for NSCA's upcoming Pivot to Profit business transformation conference this year is to help integration companies better position themselves for post-pandemic success. To prepare, we conducted market analysis to better understand how different types of integration companies were impacted.

What you see here is a broad view of what we uncovered (without breaking the data down based on vertical markets or technology solutions). The information focuses on big integrators (defined as 100 or more employees) vs. small companies (less than 100 employees).

During the first half of 2020, large integrators were hit hard. More than one-half saw dramatic decreases of over 10% in revenue. Only 10% saw significant growth.

Small integrators were hit slightly less hard in the first half of 2020. Still, 35% saw big decreases; 20% managed significant growth.

In the second half of 2020, large integrators were still getting beaten up: 40% saw significant revenue setbacks. Once again, only 10% grew revenue significantly.

The small integrators seemed to receive a delayed punch: As the year went on, they were hit harder. During the second half of 2020, 43% saw big revenue hits; 22% were doing okay growth-wise.

In Q1 2021, the big companies seem to be turning a corner. Only one-quarter are seeing revenue decreases of more than 10%. The number of big companies increasing revenue is starting to climb a little.

Small integration companies don't seem to be turning the corner as quickly. The number of companies experiencing significant revenue decreases dropped to 35%, but the number of small integrators actually growing revenue is also down.

The bottom line: It's getter better for big companies faster than it's getting better for small companies, according to this research.

NEW RESEARCH: ROAD TO RECOVERY

OVERALL REVENUE	Big Integrators (>100 employees)	Small Integrators (<100 employees)
1st HALF 2020	>10% Decrease 55% >10% Increase 10%	>10% Decrease 35% >10% Increase 20%
2nd HALF 2020	>10% Decrease 40% >10% Increase 10%	>10% Decrease 43% >10% Increase 22%
Q1 2021	>10% Decrease 25% >10% Increase 15%	>10% Decrease 35% >10% Increase 8%

Getting better for larger firms. Not so much for smaller firms.

LEARN MORE

Many more details from this market analysis will be presented at Pivot to Profit in Atlanta on Sept. 21-22. Register **here**.

NSCA Members *Should* Know about PASS K-12

Integrators and manufacturers that offer solutions for K-12 schools owe it to themselves (and their customers) to understand the guidelines created by the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS).

If you've attended a Pivot to Profit event or Business & Leadership Conference, you've likely heard NSCA CEO Chuck Wilson mention the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS) K-12 initiative. The organization was co-founded by NSCA and the Security Industry Association (SIA).

But do you really understand what PASS K-12 is and how integrators and manufacturers can leverage it?

Put simply, PASS K-12 offers guidelines and checklists to help schools plan for better security. There are opportunities for integrators and manufacturers to use PASS guidelines to create value for K-12 customers.

Mark Williams, a 30-plus-year veteran of the security and safety industry, serves as board chairman for PASS K-12. We asked him to answer common questions to help you better understand the initiative.

NSCA: How do you describe PASS K-12?

Mark: First established in 2014, PASS K-12 was incorporated as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) last fall. We're a coalition of organizations and individuals from the education, public safety, and technology integration communities that came together to support best practices for school safety and security.

NSCA: What connections do NSCA and SIA have to PASS K-12?

Mark: I can't overstate the importance of NSCA and SIA. Those two organizations founded PASS K-12 back in 2013 on the heels of Sandy Hook. Both organizations were in the process of developing their own safe school programs and were heading down parallel paths. They decided to collaborate and formed PASS K-12. They've been active participants and leaders in the organization ever since.

NSCA: What does PASS K-12 provide to schools?

Mark: We're asked that a lot. We provide school administrators, school boards, public safety officials, and security officials with a roadmap and guidelines to implement a layered, tiered approach to enhance the safety and security of school environments. I love the term "roadmap" because it's so accurate. When you pull out a roadmap, you're looking for where you are, where've you been, where you're going, and how to get there. Through our guidelines and checklist tools, we help stakeholders answer three questions: What should we do? How do we prioritize? Where do we start?

NSCA: PASS K-12 is manufacturer and product agnostic. What does that mean?

Mark: We don't endorse manufacturers or products in the guidelines. We focus on life safety and physical security. Our recommendations are limited to equipment and technology on a performance-based approach. When we talk about video, we talk about how many pixels a camera should have and where should you use pan, tilt, and zoom. It's a generic conversation about products in a performance-oriented way.

NSCA: How does PASS K-12 earn revenue?

Mark: It's always challenging for a nonprofit run by volunteers. That being said, we've developed a partner program that allows organizations to subscribe to PASS on an annual basis. Basically, this subscription program provides partners with access to our partner portal featuring safe school resources. We also agree to support our partners with local and virtual PASS K-12 programs for their teams and clients. The partner program is the main revenue source right now.

NSCA: What's the benefit of becoming a PASS K-12 partner for integrators?

Mark: It puts them in a consultative position with clients. They're bringing resources and a roadmap to enhance the safety and security of their environments, whether it's around their services or the broader, bigger picture of a comprehensive safety and security plan. None of us are experts in everything, but this places partners in a position of being members of a safe schools team.

"[PASS] puts [integrators] in a consultative position with clients. They're bringing schools a resource and roadmap to enhance the safety and security of their environments."

–Mark Williams,
PASS Board Chairman

NSCA: How can an integrator that's a PASS partner use the guidelines and assessment tools?

Mark: It spans a broad range of approaches. Many of our partners bring the guidelines and checklist tool to their school clients. We have presentations that walk through those documents and help them explain the big picture of school security to their clients. Some integrators have used the checklist tools to help schools complete building assessments in their particular areas of expertise: access control, video, communication, or detection and alarms. There are many ways our partners use the guidelines and their PASS partnership to help schools and school clients enhance safety and security.

NSCA: What prerequisites are required for an integrator to join PASS? What are the steps to get there?

Mark: There's an application process. Part of the application includes a memorandum of understanding that establishes a two-way commitment between PASS and its partners. We have a number of things we expect of our partners, and there are a number of items our partners should expect from PASS.

Once the application is filed, it goes through an approval process. Once approved, we have a training program that's part of that memorandum of understanding. Once we complete the training program, the partners are up and going. We put their logo on the PASS K-12 website, and we like them to put our logo on theirs. They also gain access to the partner portal, which includes the guidelines, checklist, presentations, etc.

NSCA: What's the benefit of becoming a PASS K-12 partner for manufacturers?

Mark: Many manufacturers have teams focused on the K-12 environment and are interested in developing consultative relationships. They're also committed to a set of values that include investing in worthwhile causes that make a difference. A lot of manufacturers also have teams that work with architects and general contractors on specifications for new projects. They can bring this resource to folks who are in decision-making positions on the front end of projects.

NSCA: What prerequisites are required for a manufacturer to join PASS? What are the steps to get there?

Mark: They follow the same process we talked about for integrators.

NSCA: What about nonprofit organizations joining PASS?

Mark: Several nonprofits are PASS partners or endorse PASS: Safe and Sound Schools, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, NFPA, and NASRO. Of course, SIA and NSCA are both nonprofit organizations as well. Many of these folks found us; we didn't approach them.

PASS®
Partner Alliance for Safer Schools
2021 PARTNER

Get to Know Our Committees & Councils

NSCA created committees to capture member mindshare and track what's happening in each corner of the industry.

To help build out NSCA's succession plan (flip to page 44 to learn more), former NSCA Board of Directors President Josh Shanahan was instrumental in launching the association's committees and councils

Shanahan explains: "I had reached out to former NSCA presidents and asked, 'What do you think would make my term the most effective?' They placed emphasis on committees and how we need to create and better leverage them." His goal? To make use of the mindshare of our membership so everyone can benefit.

Each committee or council is made up of industry professionals who are interested in a specific area of business—marketing, finance, leadership, etc.—and have skillsets to complement those interests. They volunteer their time and add value when and where they can. Each group has its own mission, purpose statement, vision, and goals to guide its work.

These committees are also great examples of how NSCA tracks what's happening in each corner of the industry so we can be the first to alert members to changes or trends. As the industry shifts, so do our committees.

GET INVOLVED!

We're always looking for people who are interested in these topics and able to provide insight. If you want to get involved, visit NSCA's Committees & Councils page and contact the appropriate chair. Or simply email NSCA Executive Director Tom LeBlanc at tleblanc@nsca.org.

NSCA committee and council members volunteer their time and add value when and where they can. Each group has its own mission, purpose statement, vision, and goals to guide its work.

Get to know NSCA's current committees and councils:

Codes and Compliance Committee

Mission: *To provide a focal point for awareness and action on key legislative and regulatory issues for the industry.*

This group focuses on issues related to licensure, codes, standards, policy, compliance, permits, industry classifications, regulations, contract law, safety, and best practices in managing software licenses, obligations of agreements, etc.

Emerging Technologies Committee

Mission: *To stay on top of the enabling and disruptive technology our members will provide to clients or interface with—and build awareness within membership of the impact this technology will have on business.*

This group tracks enabling and disruptive technology for members and educates them on potential opportunities and challenges.

Events Committee

Mission: *To make sure that the webinars, roundtables, and live and virtual events led by NSCA focus on the topics that matter most to integrators.*

This group provides valuable insight and input on curriculum and content for events like the Business & Leadership Conference and Pivot to Profit.

Executive Committee

Mission: *To provide a focal point for evaluation of the effectiveness, performance, and practices of the executive director and other staff.*

This group deals directly with the contract for NSCA's executive director and issues that need to be dealt with between board meetings, as well as staff and organizational issues.

Financial Leadership Council

Mission: *To serve as a peer group and financial interest community that acts as a highly valuable resource for methods of practicing financial leadership.*

This group provides timely, relevant, and accurate reporting of financial information to NSCA management and helps make decisions about future association investments. It also demonstrates how systems integrators can effectively use NSCA data and research to improve their own businesses.

Ignite 2.0 Committee

Mission: *To inspire members and the industry as a whole to embrace the concepts and practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion.*

This group provides members with the foresight and knowledge to instill inclusivity and diversity as cornerstones of their businesses—and to realize the business benefits of doing so.

Leadership Development Council

Mission: *To provide guidance and mentoring to the board of directors on governance issues and develop long-range strategies for talent management and leadership.*

This group maintains NSCA's history and provides guidance and mentoring to allow NSCA to stay true to its guiding principles and beliefs while facing the reality and excitement of the future. It also advises the NSCA board of directors on governance issues, including bylaw adherence, conflict of interest concerns, risk mitigation, indemnification, D&O liability matters, etc.

Marketing/Communications Committee

Mission: *To provide leadership and guidance on the NSCA brand promise along with how NSCA presents itself in relationship to the organization's goals and purpose.*

This group supports the growth and success of NSCA through awareness initiatives while guiding and supporting NSCA staff in marketing efforts and media relationships.

Membership Committee

Mission: *To provide guidance, support, and oversight for the numbers and categories of members that make up NSCA and provide recommendations to the board regarding dues structures.*

This group supports membership growth, constantly examines ways NSCA can offer more value, and helps members make maximum use of available tools.

Our committee members are also people who will be strongly considered for board positions in the future. Joining NSCA in this capacity is an opportunity to preview what that experience might be like.

8 Tips to Create STICKY CUSTOMERS

By Teresa Solorio

Challenge yourself: Do you truly leverage your CRM system by keeping it fully updated and leveraging the data?

You may be familiar with these CRM best practices, but does your team follow them?

Usually, when folks in the integration industry talk about creating "customer stickiness," it's within the context of selling recurring revenue contracts. Sure, that creates stickiness, but there are other ways to reinforce your connection with customers.

Building a successful business requires gaining customer trust and loyalty—doing so strengthens your base and generates leads as customers share stories about your business.

But what are some logical ways to strengthen those customer relationships and improve customer stickiness? We asked members of the NSCA Membership Committee for their tried-and-true tips on improving sales engagement and strengthening and growing their businesses.

1. Do the Leg Work

Identify your ideal customers: the ones who stick around for the long term and have loyalty to your brand. They're out there, but they aren't always easy to find. Do your research first and know who they are. Once identified, make the call and give the pitch.

2. Leverage Data

Settle on a robust customer relationship management (CRM) solution that serves as a place for all customer interaction. People change companies, start companies, and change positions. It's important to track the movement of customers throughout their professional evolutions.

Just as important: Mandate that your sales and customer-facing employees utilize it.

3. Hone Your Pitch

Tell a story. We learned from Kindra Hall a few years ago at the Business & Leadership Conference that stories are incredibly memorable.

Using stories to share experiences, emphasize a point, or change a perception is a great way to get customers to remember you and your solution. It's the start of building the "stickiness" you're looking for.

4. Elevate Customer Service

You've made the sale. What follows next is what will put you ahead of the others: the best customer service.

This one thing makes a big impact on loyalty and retention. Little things count: speed, quality, thoroughness, and follow-through. What you see as something little may be very big in the eyes of a customer—and what can help your company lead the pack. That might mean you need a team of people to handle the post-sales part of the job. You need to have someone ready to respond each time your customer reaches out … and that response needs to be as close to immediate as possible.

Don't be afraid to pick up the phone to call a customer. It should also be easy for them to reach you. These days, there are multiple ways to connect. Be sure you're checking/using all of them.

7. Be Open and Honest

From the very first interaction, be upfront with customers. Let them know what to expect. Don't overpromise and underdeliver. Be clear and straightforward.

It's okay to let customers know when you don't have an answer to a question. They'll appreciate your honesty as you let them know you'll get back to them with an answer. Make sure to set a date by which to do so and respond within that timeline. By the end of the interaction, your customer should know exactly what to expect and be ready to sign that agreement or place an order.

GIVE EVERY INTERACTION A PERSONAL TOUCH! IF THERE'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO GO ABOVE THE NORM … THEN TAKE IT!

5. Get Personal

Log the results of customer service calls in your CRM system, ensuring that the team knows about issues related to your customers. Your team should feel comfortable sharing information with each other when it comes to problems they uncover during the call process. Sharing information creates consistency for future contacts.

Your team should be flexible; not all customers are the same. Empower employees to make concessions or add value when warranted. A customer feels like he or she is getting special treatment if you treat them like they're your only customer. Give every interaction a personal touch! If there's an opportunity to go beyond the norm, then take it! A few extra seconds of effort can be all it takes to make a customer's day. That can go a long way in establishing the kinds of relationships you want for your brand.

6. Think Customer First

Empower your employees to think about the customer in every situation and make a positive impact with each interaction.

Your customer may not remember each item you presented during your interaction with them, but they will form a memory of the feeling of the meeting. Being confident, friendly, and intentional in your presentation will leave customers with a strong memory that sticks in their minds so they want more interaction in the future.

8. Get Feedback

Customers want to know that the companies they partner with care about their opinions. The best way to show it? Ask for feedback. Has your team lived up to their expectations? Are they getting support when they have questions? Are they satisfied with their experience?

Sending occasional surveys to gather feedback can be educational and help your company raise the bar. Make sure to include a place where they can provide suggestions for improvement. When you use feedback to make real changes, you show your customers you value their input. And when you make those changes, let them know—and thank them.

Ultimately, building relationships by gaining trust, telling your story, creating that exceptional customer service experience, and making them your priority will create loyal customers who provide positive endorsements to strengthen your business.

Focus on the core of your business: the customer. Without them, you have no business.

NSCA Director of Operations Teresa Solorio is a member of NSCA's Membership Committee. Its goal is to provide guidance, support, and oversight to help NSCA members receive value from their trade association.

SUPPLY CHAIN CONCERNS:

5 Key Perspectives

Many integrators have concerns about product availability and pricing amid COVID-19 recovery. NSCA's Emerging Technologies Committee shares these key considerations.

By Mike Abernathy

The COVID-19 pandemic spawned plenty of challenges for integration companies. One issue relates to the supply chain: product availability and price increases.

Why is this so important? As the economy is expected to grow, and projects continue to go online in Q2 and Q3 of 2021, the integration channel must figure out how to manage increased pricing of key components along with delays in delivery of devices from suppliers. Through all of this, integrators still need to ensure that these new projects are on time, on scope, and on budget.

1. Vendor/Manufacturer Point of View

Component and product availability challenges are affecting all parts of the channel. JB Fowler, chief product officer at Domotz, says that, while Domotz is primarily a software-as-a-service organization, it does supply hardware to clients. "Importation of hardware has been our biggest challenge during this pandemic. Ocean freight delays increased shipping times by 10% to 20%. This sometimes forces manufacturers to air freight product, which increases freight costs by 400% to 500%."

All suppliers are dealing with these issues, which affects the build price of products and increases base product cost to integrators. Importation delays seriously impact overall costs within all points of the supply chain.

There is a bright side, though, says Fowler. "There's an element of elasticity when it comes to costs and pricing of products, which allows suppliers and manufacturers to share in some of this burden to vendors. The key is making sure we don't stretch one part of the supply chain to its breaking point."

Harry Aller of Innovative Lighting stresses that the key is communication through the channel. "This is important to minimize the impact of global supply chain challenges," he says. "During shutdowns due to COVID-19, manufacturing sales projections were severely disrupted and, as a result, component orders were cut back to minimize excessive inventory buildup. Now, due to government's injection of cash into the economy, consumer spending increased and component demand skyrocketed. End-users need to plan and communicate with their contractors. Contractors need to communicate with their distributors. Distributors need to communicate with manufacturers so they can source components and build products. Communication, communication, communication!"

2. Sales/Business Development/Marketing Point of View

Indeed, communication is key during times of uncertainty—and these are uncertain times.

There is uncertainly at all levels of the integration channel, according to Jeff Brum, marketing director at Mechdyne Corporation. "Just about everyone has felt the impact of the pandemic on their business. Uncertainty can extend to how prospects think about suppliers. Organizations may be concerned about an integrator's strength and viability. As an integrator, communicate your strengths. Allay any fears about your ability to deliver and support."

Communicate with your clients and be honest about the real challenges in logistics for projects and the importance of planning, advises NSCA Secretary and IVCi CTO Tim Hennen. "This is something we always took for granted," he says. "Equipment availability, pricing fluctuations, labor, and other factors now have a huge impact on when you can deploy the project and how much it will cost. You need to protect your company and margins by controlling how long your quote is good or by being open with your customers to allow for pricing changes if something happens from engagement to execution."

There's also that looming variable about potential price increases during a project, and many integrators are concerned. "Discuss with procurement the length of time to cut a purchase order," Hennen advises. "Make sure you can keep the quote valid until they can run through their cycle. Leverage budgetary estimates or initial design with a contingency number to make sure you and your customer are protected in case costs increase."

3. Engineering/Design Point of View

Integrators, meanwhile, need to communicate their concerns and questions to vendors. Engineers in particular should ask these five questions as they're designing and proposing a project:

1. What are realistic delivery times for products?
2. Are there alternative designs/products that integrators should lead with?
3. Are there manufacturers and products available from the Mexico/Canada channel?
4. Due to supply chain issues, are there any impacts on indirect costs?
5. How often will you be able to update on supply forecasts?

WANT MORE? Join "Confronting Supply Chain Concerns: An NSCA Roundtable," July 13 and 14. Register here.

During the design phase, integrators should find as many backup vendors as possible.

During the design phase, integrators should also find as many backup vendors as possible. Joe Perez of ClearTech finds his company looking at new products, as well as proven products the team hasn't worked with before. "We're establishing new relationships to serve our clients," he says.

Integrators also need to challenge themselves by contemplating alternative solutions within their designs, Perez says. "We'll need to consider other possible solutions with the same outcome to meet clients' needs before they become urgent. Consult with clients and ask if there are other non-AV/non-security or construction-related products that could affect the specified equipment. Work with clients that may be standardized on a certain platform/product to consider other brands if needed."

Integrators need to be proactive and work with manufacturers and vendors. Perez sees integrators "working with vendors that will allocate and hold products until needed."

> **"Equipment availability, pricing fluctuations, labor, and other factors now have a huge impact on when you can deploy the project and how much it will cost."**
>
> –Tim Hennen, NSCA Emerging Technologies Committee

4. Operations/Implementation Point of View

From an operational perspective, there are several important steps integrators must take to ensure that projects continue to be completed on time and profitably amidst challenges with product availability.

This starts with a successful project kickoff meeting internally. Dust off your checklist. Determine which products need to be ordered early in the project timeline or which will need substitutions. Making this a priority gives you time to pivot and find alternatives.

The operations team is always hit with the latest and greatest tech the sales team sells. Typically, sales sells something new that they think will solve a customer's problem. That, of course, comes with a learning curve, which costs the operations team more time in the shop testing or onsite. Patrick Whipkey, director of USAV Group, says the goal is to align with the sales team prior to selling something completely new and do research on the product. "Bring in a demo/eval unit and put it through its paces. This will not only save time and money in the field, but it will also set the entire team up for success."

If the operations team is quick and efficient, then the sales team typically makes more money—a win-win. "It's the age-old battle between sales and ops, but the more upfront questions and constant communication between both teams will represent a higher GP when the project closes," Whipkey says.

Product availability challenges can be a "glass-half-full" opportunity. Integrators can leverage creativity to discover new and exciting products. These products may have additional functionality at a lower cost, improving profitability.

Meanwhile, digitizing work orders, processes, and communication tools has never made more sense. Paper documents are fixed. Changed circumstances affect individual work orders or companywide policies, and those documents are instantly out of date. Digital documents are living things. When circumstances change, documents are instantly updated and sent out to every employee and department that needs to have the updated information.

5. Cybersecurity Point of View

SolarWinds, Tesla/Verkada, and other high-profile breaches shed light on cybersecurity risks and challenges associated with supply chain. Meanwhile, surging demand due to COVID-19, remote work, and new technologies is contributing to a chip shortage.

Cyberattackers are actively utilizing news headlines and urgent situations, according to Shanna Utgard, success manager at Defendify. Fake invoices, purchase orders, redirection, shipment notices, wire requests, payment details, quotations, and business email compromises have all surged in recent months, she says.

"If you must source additional suppliers, beware of clones, compromises, and embedded malware," Utgard says. "Low-cost solutions manufactured in high-risk countries could contain potential backdoors. Dark Cubed recently released a report that found every analyzed IoT device to have strong connections to and communication with infrastructure in China. Scrutinize potential new vendors about how they handle security vulnerabilities. Does the supplier have a long and verifiable history—or did they pop up recently and conveniently?"

IoT devices in the supply chain have expanded the attack surface for bad actors. "They understand the interconnectivity of control systems and how they can jump from IoT to IT and OT," she adds. "Vulnerabilities in third-party software are a frequent cause of breaches. Protect yourself first, then secure what you sell."

The overwhelming advice for dealing with supply chain challenges amid the pandemic recovery, according to NSCA's Emerging Technologies Committee, is to strive for effective, constant communication. That means not only throughout the project, but also at all levels of the channel. Delays in key products and pricing fluctuations are likely to continue throughout the year. Be prepared and add additional steps to your process—from sales to commissioning of a project.

Mike Abernathy is NSCA's director of business resources and liaison to the Emerging Technologies Committee. Contact him at mabernathy@nsca.org.

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FINANCE

How I Doubled My Integration Business

Large companies may get the majority of headlines, but the integration industry is made up of many relatively small companies. Here are four principles to help companies of that size grow their success.

By Laurie Mackeigan

In 2014, my husband and I bought Backman Vidcom, a 40-year-old audiovisual integrator in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We had zero experience in the industry, but we felt we had the skills to run a business.

I'm a CPA and my husband, Tom Murray, has an extensive sales background. We quickly realized that the company was struggling and had a poor reputation in the region. Not only did we have to quickly learn the industry, but we also had to ensure that the company survived.

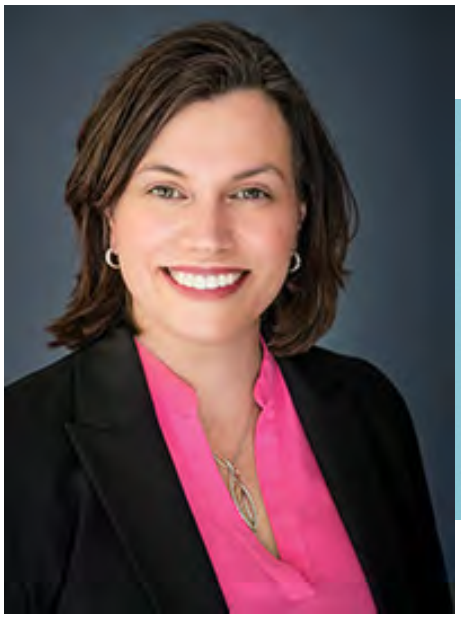
Early on, we brought on our third partner: a VP of technology. As a result, we now have three owners who are highly skilled within one of the three legs of our business stool: finance, sales, technology. We rebranded and went into the community to ask our customers for another chance.

It took a few years, but we more than doubled the revenues, employees, and profits.

Here are the factors that I believe led to our success—and could help other relatively small integration companies like ours …

1. Watch the (Important) Numbers Like a Hawk

- ***Always know your cash situation.*** You need a good line of credit and a great relationship with your banker. My banker goes to bat for me when we need more cash for a big project.
- ***Stay on top of receivables.*** Sometimes the squeaky wheel gets paid sooner.
- ***Look at your open projects.*** Focus on getting the last 5% or 10% finished as soon as possible to get projects invoiced. Technical staff are often excited about new projects and not as concerned about the ones dragging on. Get those buttoned up.
- ***Know which customers make you money.*** We stopped quoting customers that never bought from us but needed that third quote. We focus on the 20% that give us 80% of our revenues and profits.
- ***Focus on profits.*** Early on, someone told me that "revenues are for vanity and profits are for sanity." We focus on the profitable customers and let others fight over low-margin work.



Early on, someone told me that "revenues are for vanity and profits are for sanity." We focus on the profitable customers and let others fight over low-margin work.

2. Treat Your People Well

We spend a lot of time and money training our people. We reward people for getting their CTS. Skills can always be improved. Sales and leadership training are also important.

Meanwhile, finding skilled AV professionals is difficult. When you find them, you need to keep them. We do our best to keep them engaged, pay them well, respect their evenings and weekends, and give them interesting work.

We constantly ask for feedback on what we can do to be better.

3. Strive for Continuous Improvement

We look at every project we close and examine the time it took compared to the time we budgeted. It helps us better estimate in the future, and we learn where issues arose and improvements in process are needed.

We track job issues when they arise, identify how they happened, and discuss how we can be better going forward. Is more training required? Do we need to stop specifying a certain piece of equipment (for example, a cheaper mount can be difficult to install, which actually costs you more in time and labor).

We ask to debrief with clients after bids whether we win or lose. It helps us be better every time we answer an RFP.

4. Sell and Network

- Owners can be very effective salespeople. Customers appreciate having direct access to owners. We meet with our key customers on a regular basis and ask for feedback on how we can be better.
- We joined organizations like NSCA and PSNI. These networks have allowed us to learn from our peers and provided us with excellent revenue opportunities by teaming up with other integrators for work in our region or on projects we weren't big enough to tackle on our own.
- We closely watch local business news sources for announcements about developments so we can get in early on larger projects.
- When we do good work, the word gets around. We find that our reputation helps us positively now.

None of these factors translated to success on their own, but, collectively, they led to the doubling of our business. Meanwhile, we continue to focus on No. 3: Stiving for continuous improvement.

Laurie Mackeigan, CPA, is president of Backman Vidcom. She is an NSCA board member and a member of the NSCA Financial Leadership Council.

ON MEMBERS' MINDS

When someone outside of the integration industry asks what you do for a living, how do you describe it?

NSCA's membership is a community. The individuals and companies that make up NSCA share common challenges. We take pride in providing a community where you can discuss shared obstacles and successes. "On Members' Minds" is just one platform to share thoughts on the integration market.

"It's simple. We exist to strengthen businesses. Customer service is our greatest technology. It's not just a cool bumper sticker for me; it's a way of being. My purpose is being of service, delivering massive value, and simplifying technology! The guiding principle in all my business ventures is: How can I contribute and create impact? The key to living is giving!"

Jack Tavares,
CEO, Total Network Consulting

"When people ask this type of question, they are typically looking for a 10,000-foot response. So, I mention well-known venues, arenas, gyms, and places we have installed that people can relate to. 'We installed all the sound, lights, and video in those places. See that cool LED wall? That was us! Oh, and we do boardrooms, too.' Sometimes, that leads to a more in-depth conversation but, for the most part, it's a head nod and the conversation carries on."

Bob Guy,
Partner, BranchAV

"We design and install communications systems that people interact with on a daily basis. The internet, TVs, Zoom Rooms, and key cards you use at your office? We install that. When you only hear three out of 10 words from your coworker in a virtual meeting, we're the guys who fix that. Ever wondered who put the screens, speakers, and WiFi in the grocery store, stadiums, music venues? That's us, too!

"We're so much more than low-voltage cable pullers or technicians with computers. We're interesting folks—artists, techies, and professionals who care deeply about communication and technology. The world is flourishing with talent, and my hope is that our industry moves out of the shadow of anonymity that has been undeserving and under-recognized for so long and grows to become a recognizable career path for a much larger group of diverse individuals. We have plenty of room for bright, young minds of all backgrounds, genders, and colors. Let's all do our part in letting people know about the amazing careers they have waiting for them in the systems integration industry!"

Mitsu Orozco,
CEO, Premier AV Tech Inc.

"I tell them we're straight forward systems contractors. We provide solutions and equipment for all our customers' audiovisual and technical needs. We don't define ourselves as an 'AV contractor,' 'sound contractor,' or 'video or lighting contractor.' We are all of the above; we are one of the few companies on the island that serve the complete vertical markets on all the fields of sound, lighting, video, IMAG, rigging, acoustics, and broadcast equipment including, but not limited to, theaters, broadcast, houses of worship, corporate, K-12, higher education, cinema, residential, and more."

Alex Rojas,
VP, AVL Group (Puerto Rico)

WANT MORE?

Read why NSCA's Chuck Wilson says "integrator" is the right word to describe what we do.

"Delivering solutions for the workplace and agile-workforce technology stack. Historically, 'tech stack' has been more of an app and software-centric term. As AV, access control and security, PoE lighting, etc. include software and demand for analytics on the back end, the solutions we deliver become more relevant in this broader sense. A marketer's creative license aside, a tech stack is what makes something run: a building, office, hotel, team, workforce. That's the ultimate message I try to convey."

Theresa Hahn,
VP of Market Development,
USIS AudioVisual Systems

"I try to relate our work as integrators to an organization or venue the person may be familiar with. I describe our projects on video wall/display installation in corporations, universities, and healthcare facilities, as well as the collaborative conferencing solutions we offer to stay connected virtually."

Dawn Walczak,
Senior Operations Manager, HB Communications

Take Your Seat at the BIG TABLE

There's a big difference between NSCA members and other integrators in the field—and these differences often come down to understanding the gravity of cybersecurity controls.

By Sid Bose

NSCA members are the cream of the crop—we insist on that. Put simply, we expect NSCA member firms to live up to expectations that many other integrators do not.

This is reflected in the solutions you provide to solve customers' business challenges and in how you support your customers. But we've also added something else to this list of expectations: Protecting your customers by understanding important codes and standards for cybersecurity and privacy. This separates truly professional integration companies from the rest.

NSCA members are educated and responsible when it comes to understanding security and privacy—and making sure that customers' networks and information are protected. To truly be of value to customers and connect viable solutions to their networks, you should know how to deploy security and privacy controls.

Connectivity: Codes and Your Customers

Technology plays an important role in all facets of our day-to-day lives. From connected coffee makers and smart cars to automated buildings, the proliferation of technology has also created cyberthreats that significantly impact quality of life and work. Threats like ransomware, denial of service, and hackers are just as devastating to a small company as they are to a large, sophisticated IT organization.

Integrators now play a critical role in the design, deployment, and maintenance of customers' networks and IoT. Technologies like smart systems and connected devices are unique and present new security and privacy challenges for you and your customers. To that end, it's important to understand and manage such risks and be cognizant of cyberthreats and steps to prevent or mitigate threats.

The resources featured in the sidebar provide useful guidance for integrators in terms of elementary cybersecurity best practices designed to reduce risks. For example, changing default passwords on routers is a foundational cybersecurity practice but is often overlooked, becoming a key vulnerability that serves as a springboard for larger cybersecurity incidents.

Integrators that want to manage and enhance their customers' cybersecurity posture should incorporate the guidance and best practices shared here. Cybersecurity hygiene can be a core competency for integrators and, more importantly, provide invaluable privacy and security benefits to customers in this digital ecosystem.

NSCA members should operate with the understanding that such guidance will only expand to more comprehensive controls. Just as NSCA embraces its role as a trusted partner to integrators, NSCA members become trusted partners to their customers by staying a step ahead of cyber standards. *That's* how you earn your seat at the big table.

Sid Bose is a data security and privacy attorney at Ice Miller LLP. He's also a member of NSCA's Emerging Technologies Committee.

CYBER CODES & RESOURCES

Underwriters Laboratories' (UL's) Cybersecurity Assurance Program (CAP):

Cybersecurity Considerations for Connected Smart Home Systems and Devices

- UL 2900-1, Outline of Investigation for Software Cybersecurity for Network-Connectable Products, Part 1: General Requirements
- UL 2900-2-1, Outline of Investigation for Software Cybersecurity for Network-Connectable Products, Part 2-1: Particular Requirements for Network-Connectable Components of Healthcare Systems
- UL 2900-2- 2, Outline of Investigation for Software Cybersecurity for Network-Connectable Products, Part 2-2: Particular Requirements for Industrial Control Systems
- UL 2900-3 (currently under development), Outline of Investigation for Software Security of Network-Connectable Products, Part 3: General Requirements
  This three-part series of standards is expected to address the general testing of organizational systems and processes for conducting the risk assessment necessary to identify applicable, software-based cyber threats and the ability of an organization to include appropriate security in the product development process.

Consumer Technology Association:

- Connected Home Security Checklist

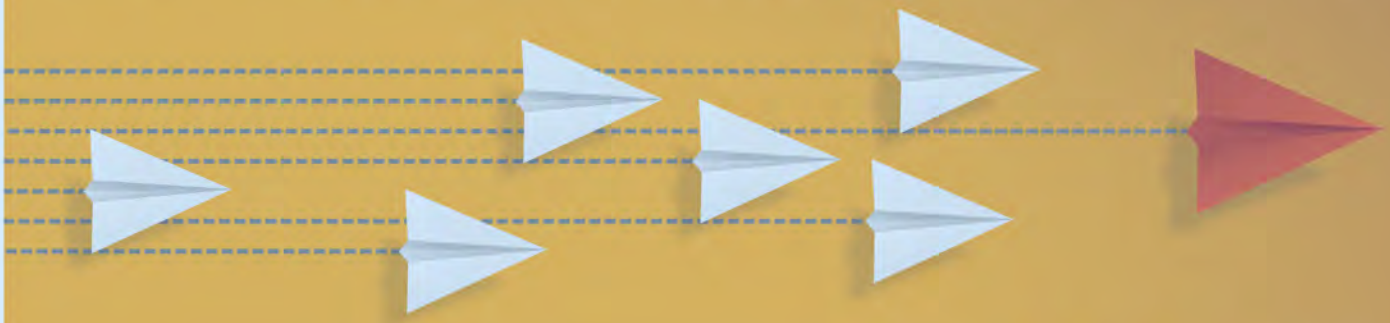
European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA):

- Security and Resilience of Smart Home Environments

LEARN MORE ABOUT CYBER POLICIES

Visit the Online Essentials Library under the "Resources" tab at NSCA.org and click on "IT/Cyber/IoT."

Stay Relevant, Stay Ahead.



Learn how to maintain your company's core values and support ever-shifting customer demands while discovering lucrative pathways to increase revenue.

PIVOT TO PROFIT®

Pivot To Profit 2021 Sept. 21-22 • Atlanta Airport Marriott

Finding the Missing
to Build Out Managed Services

Fueled by Pivot to Profit, Automated Systems Design commits to overcoming obstacles to managed services success.

It was late 2014 when Alpharetta, GA-based Automated Systems Design (ASD) first seriously considered recurring revenue as a business model.

"It sounded great, but we really didn't understand how to roll it out," says Abe Fleming, director of sales at ASD. "It was hard to connect the dots in the beginning so that it would make sense for our clients."

To better understand finance programs, NSCA introduced the company to GreatAmerica, a financial institution that helps NSCA members offer modern and efficient financing options to customers. From those conversations, Fleming realized there were ways to simplify quoting and streamline approaches to help customers consolidate technology expenses.

ASD and GreatAmerica also worked together to develop cobranded material for ASD's sales team so they could talk confidently to customers about the value of buying technology through monthly payments. Once ASD had a solid managed services offering in place for its customers, the next step was to sell it—and that's where Fleming says the team got stuck.

"We still struggled a little," he explains. "You have to do discovery with customers and find out whether the opex model is even possible or of interest." Some of the company's sales executives were comfortable with having those conversations; others tended to forget the program was even available.

"It's easier for reps to say, 'Here are your projects. Sign here, and we'll send you a bill." With monthly payments, it's, 'Let me do a credit check. Let me walk you through how this breaks down. Let me bring my finance partner to the table,' " says Mike Castiglione, COO at ASD. "It required constant retraining and extra steps in the process."

The team kept moving forward—and even landed a handful of deals—but they knew there was still something missing: the nuts and bolts of how to really build a successful program.

ASD says it was NSCA and the Pivot to Profit conference that finally gave them the information and step-by-step guidance they needed to determine how to best sell managed services from start to finish.

"We go to a lot of different shows, and NSCA's events always seem to be the most relative to what we're doing on a daily basis. We always walk away with something good," says Castiglione. "It gives us a chance to see what other people are doing and benchmark our progress. We use that information to work on the business, not on the jobs we're doing."

Pivot Point for ASD

Pivot to Profit was developed specifically to help integrators learn to "pivot" to discover new growth opportunities and lucrative pathways to increase revenue in today's environment.

The event has also given ASD lots to consider in terms of creating predictable monthly income and introducing customers to new ways of financing the technology solutions they need.

Pivot to Profit has also helped the company narrow in on the types of customers that might be open to paying monthly for technology. While ASD has focused primarily on new construction, refresh, and remodel projects—where many clients have secured construction loans and the value of monthly payments doesn't resonate—they're also looking for clients with a break-fix approach or a new technology initiative that wasn't planned for or included in the current budget.

"There are still lots of possibilities for managed services to fit within the world of construction, but we also have new paths to consider to get there," says Fleming.

Even though they've attended before, Fleming and Castiglione both say Pivot to Profit is worth attending every year because they learn something new each time. Depending on the topics covered, ASD sometimes rotates staff members based on who may need or want exposure to the content.

> **"There are still lots of possibiliti for managed services to fit within world of construction, but we also new paths to consider to get ther**
>
> –Abe Fleming, Director of Sales, ASD

Pieces

"We go to a lot of different shows, and NSCA's events always seem to be the most relative to what we're doing on a daily basis. We always walk away with something good."

–Mike Castiglione, COO, ASD

As ASD works on refining its managed services program, the conference is an opportunity to refine and refocus its approach. For example: ASD is currently working on a process that will include renewables in service contracts—and the company is relying on resources like Pivot to Profit to help determine the best ways to do this.

"We finance the gear, but we want a percentage of that project as an RMR service agreement that gets passed through GreatAmerica," says Fleming. "NSCA helps us hammer out some of the backend details on how to make these things happen, especially since we're still learning."

This year, Pivot to Profit will focus on helping project-centric companies become managed services providers, detailing the impact of predictable monthly income (and properly recognizing that revenue), and revealing the emerging innovations that could disrupt or enable opportunity—depending on how they're handled.

"NSCA does a really good job of identifying relevant items to talk about," says Castiglione. "They also provide a forum where we get to work with similar companies in our industry, have great conversations, and build new potential partnerships. It's a great way to bring the team together and spend time working *on* the business instead of *in* the business.".

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2021 Pivot to Profit
is in person
September 21-22 in Atlanta.

PIVOT TO PROFIT

REGISTER NOW
www.nsca.org/p2p

The Latest from NSCA's Solution Provider Members

Unfiltered content provided directly from NSCA's manufacturer and solution provider members to keep integrators updated.

Belden

Belden Takes Home its First-Ever Emmy® Award

Belden has been named a **Technology & Engineering Emmy winner** by the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences for its "Standardization and Commercialization of Television – Broadcast, Hybrid Electrical and Fiber-Optic Camera Cable and Connectors."

As video transitioned from analog to digital, copper camera cable couldn't transmit digital signals across long distances. The industry needed a way to move digital video over long distances using fiber while providing power to cameras.

The result was Belden's development and commercialization of the first SMPTE cables to meet North American standards. Commercially available since 1999, Belden SMPTE cables are still used today for indoor and outdoor broadcast applications. The hybrid electrical and fiber-optic camera cable and connectors were standardized as SMPTE 304M/311M. This innovation accelerated adoption of digital video and allowed networks to confidently invest in digital camera equipment.

"Belden was there to create industry standards as we followed the path from analog to digital," says Vice President of Global Research and Development Martin Van Der Burgt. "Our SMPTE cable has performed through technology changes and is an integral part of broadcast television. Now the industry is moving to ultra-high definition—and Belden is ready to support that transition as well."

Holding true to its reputation for constant technology innovation, Belden introduced a solution to support ultra-high definition (UHD) for 4K video. Belden's 4K UHD Coax Cable for 12G-SDI supports 4K or UHD content *without* an overhaul to IP or fiber.

Learn more **here**.

Lencore

Sound Masking Is Nothing But Opportunity!

Help corporate clients solve the challenge of returning to their offices by improving the overall comfort of the space. Lencore offers superior products in the industry, and we continue to innovate! Join our network of Integrators, and together we can provide speech privacy, productivity and, most importantly, comfort to the workspace.

Lencore and Sound Masking:

- Market worldwide is $34 billion
- Out-of-the-Box Solution for projects under 12,000 square feet
- Solutions that meet the market demands for safety (UL 2572 standards to interface with a fire alarm panel and shut off in an emergency)
- Pre-Wired, Pre-Tested, Simple to Install and effective solutions which deliver privacy, productivity and comfort for your clients

Partner with a Leading Sound Masking Manufacturer

Learn More

Almo

Outsourced Technician Assistance: The Key to Integrator Growth

We are well into 2021 and as expected, integrator projects that have been on hold are now picking up and new projects are underway. While it was predicted this would eventually happen, is the integrator community prepared? How will you handle staffing for the onslaught of tight timelines and large installations needed for schools, businesses, restaurants, houses of worship, stadiums, hotels and other spaces the public is once again populating?

It's Not Too Late!

Almo Professional A/V can help you expand your workforce through its **Contract Labor and Project Support** service. Almo provides fleet of contracted technicians that are experienced, highly trained and follow a well-vetted scope of work, which is created with an integrator's assistance and input from the customer.

Basically, an integrator can label these services as their own to create a seamless experience for a project. From full-service supplementation or augmented labor to site surveys and service calls, Almo can help complete AV projects on time and on budget, while enabling integrators to augment staff and move into growth mode.

The need to outsource technicians was dramatically accelerated due to the pandemic's impact. A recent **Almo Blog Post** discusses the TOP THREE REASONS why outsourced technician assistance should be a key part of every integrator's 2021 strategy.

Almo Professional A/V offers a wide range of AV Services to NSCA members. They include:

- Business and Connectivity Communications
- Contract Labor and Project Support
- Control Systems and DSP Programming
- Digital Signage Services
- Drafting and Engineering
- Service and Repair Plans

BTX

BTX & Newline Interactive Sign New Distribution Partnership

BTX Technologies has been appointed by **Newline Interactive** to distribute their advanced interactive touchscreen displays, whiteboarding software and wireless presentation solutions. Newline's communication and collaboration tools are designed and engineered for the full spectrum of corporate and educational use cases, focusing on ease of use and flexibility of installation. From their award-winning whiteboard to their cutting-edge interactive touchscreen displays, Newline Interactive always focuses on creating technology that is simply impressive. We are so excited to add Newline Interactive to the BTX family of products!

Read more about the new partnership **here**.

Daktronics

Getting Started with LED Video Walls

The Daktronics Difference — We are a U.S.-based manufacturer of high-performance LED display solutions. Whatever the project or challenge, partners leverage our unmatched experience and reliable technology.

Design Your Video Wall — Daktronics offers a spectrum of choices for LED video walls, fitting nearly any size wall or application. Configure and request pricing for indoor LED video walls at **http://daktronics.com/ledconfig**.

Become a Partner — When you become a Daktronics Solutions partner, you get access to exclusive tools, resources, and a dedicated team to support you throughout your projects, giving you the ultimate advantage all free of charge.

Visit **partner.daktronics.com** to request pricing, training and to learn more about our products.

AMETEK

Back to Work with Confidence

How can integrators help with the great reopening?

AMETEK Land, world leader in temperature measurement, has temperature screening solutions that are ideal for integrators to incorporate into security door access, time & attendance and visitor management systems. Temperature screening can be an effective mitigation method, but this is only true if the equipment is suitable for this purpose. Unfortunately, many systems on the market don't meet the requirements of the FDA or even good science in some instances. Therefore to protect your reputation it is important to be able to distinguish the difference.

Read about the Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Temperature Screening

- There are systems that can help protect facilities and give extra confidence to users, however, there are also systems that instead of mitigating risk actually increase it, learn more.

Learn about the science behind effective temperature screening

- Measuring human body temperature accurately is a tough measurement, the amount of heat radiated by the human body and differential to ambient temperature makes achieving accurate and reliable measure a challenge in real world conditions, learn more.

Best practice with case studies for travel, sports, education and business

- See how the system fits seamlessly into a wide variety of applications to keep users safe whether working, resting or playing, learn more.

Download it **here**.

Jeron

Learn More about Jeron

Jeron Electronic Systems' Enterprise solution includes standardized nurse call communications, staff scheduling, workflows, mobile device notifications, call activity logging and reporting, and much more. The advanced Enterprise nurse call platform allows organizations to use mobile and WAN accessible technologies supporting the growing capabilities of their connected mobile devices. The Enterprise solution is secure, scalable, and highly available so healthcare networks can drive higher levels of patient safety, and patient and staff satisfaction.

Come to Jeron for a virtual or in-person visit to the **Provider Technology Center**, where you can experience the best-in-class nurse call technology. To request a virtual presentation visit: **jeron.com/visit-jeron**.

ClearOne

Voice Lift Technology Enhances ClearOne's BMA 360 Beamforming Microphone Array

Breakthrough technologies, FiBeam™ and DsBeam™ allow greater Voice Lift gains to be realized than previously possible. ClearOne's beamforming plus feedback cancellation technologies provides up to a 20dB boost in gain before feedback, compared to an omni mic.

FiBeam™ technology gives users the ultimate in natural and full-fidelity audio across all beams and within a single beam.

Deep Sidelobe Beamforming, DsBeam™, provides unparalleled sidelobe depth, below -40dB, resulting in superior rejection of reverb and noise in difficult spaces for unrivaled superb clarity and intelligibility.

Schedule a remote demo!

ascom

Ascom

Ascom, a global solutions provider focused on healthcare and mobile workflow solutions, is actively recruiting new IT solutions-based resellers with a proven track record of successful healthcare technology integration deployments. Ascom provides mission-critical, real-time solutions with proven outcomes for highly mobile, ad hoc, and time-sensitive environments. Ascom supplies resellers with powerful sales tools such as detailed market planners as well as an ROI calculator to help demonstrate the value of its unique solutions portfolio and software capabilities.

Ascom's global headquarters is in Switzerland, and the North American HQ in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. The company operates businesses in 18 countries and employs approximately 1,300 professionals worldwide.

For more information on becoming a certified Ascom Partner, contact Mark Teder at 919-535-6129 or **mark.teder@ascom.com**. Visit **www.ascom.us** and follow @AscomNA on Twitter and **Ascom Americas** on LinkedIn for the latest news.

AtlasIED

Request a Demo of Atmosphere

Back in July, we launched a new digital audio platform with multi-patented features and industry leading accessories. For 8 months we've been hearing from you about how powerful Atmosphere is and also what else you'd like it to do.

You spoke and we listened.

The objectives of Atmosphere's first firmware update have been prioritized from every piece of feedback received from our integrator partners and include some substantial enhancements and additional capabilities like bell scheduler, sub and stereo support, room combine, and accessory self- heal.

You'll want to see the updates in action. **So schedule a demo today**.

NEED HYBRID LEARNING SOLUTIONS? WE CAN HELP!

Visit legrandav.com

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IntelliSee

IntelliSee

IntelliSee Platform Is Ready for Integrators

The IntelliSee™ AI risk mitigation platform completed beta testing in Q1 and has launched as expected. The company is growing rapidly adding channel partners and end customer installations.

IntelliSee uses computer vision AI to autonomously monitor existing surveillance cameras in real time. Expanding on technology built by the University of Iowa's Technology Institute for the U.S. Department of Defense, the IntelliSee platform can detect—and instantly alert to—threats ranging from slip and fall hazards, to drawn weapons, fallen persons, trespassers and more.

IntelliSee is applicable to all verticals including retail/grocery, K-12, higher education, hospitals, long-term care, houses of worship, airports and corporate, commercial and manufacturing facilities.

IntelliSee's deep learning AI engine and powerful neural networks continuously learn and improve the longer it's active. One channel partner commented that they were skeptical at first, but after implementing the platform they are confident in its capabilities. The partner added that it's exciting to see the product continuously improving.

IntelliSee offers real benefits to end users and a recurring revenue opportunity for integrators. By working with existing surveillance systems, IntelliSee creates added value for customers by enhancing their security strategies and leveraging their existing investment. IntelliSee provides upsell opportunities and instant recurring revenue for integrators with its subscription-based monitoring model.

Learn more about IntelliSee and becoming a channel partner at **intellisee.com**.

Liberty AV Solutions

Learn More About Liberty AV

Liberty AV Solutions provides the connectivity to manage and adapt to today's challenges, with offerings ranging from cabling infrastructure to electronically integrated signal extension, switching, and subsystems where quality is key.

Value-added services and software solutions complete the package, and are backed by WESCO/Anixter, a world leader in B2B distribution and supply chain solutions.

Liberty's products and systems meet the demand of markets such as commercial, education, medical, hospitality, houses of worship, government, residential, and more. A leader in AV connectivity infrastructure and solution offerings, Liberty provides a single point of contact through a unique combination of products and expertise.

http://www.libertycable.com

Shure

Using CARES Act Funding to Support Higher Ed

The CARES Act made available $2.2 trillion to provide direct economic relief to those negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A proportion of this ($14 billion) was set aside specifically to help higher education facilities continue to deliver learning.

This funding isn't just about providing students with grants and laptops. It's also about investing in the technology that helps institutions uphold a high level of student comprehension. Now, a second round of funding, the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund II (HEERF II), offers colleges and universities another opportunity to upgrade or enhance the technology they're using to maintain academic excellence.

Read more **here**.

Primex

Learn More About Primex

Primex is a leading provider of solutions that automate and maintain facility compliance, to help increase efficiencies, enhance safety, and reduce risk for all types of organizations. Our OneVue® software continuously collects and stores data of each device throughout the facility and provides proactive alerts to users via text message, email or phone call to notify users when a monitored asset or device falls out of desired conditions set by the institution. This allows facilities to address a potential issue before it becomes a catastrophic event. In addition, customizable reports are readily available to demonstrate compliance to applicable accrediting agencies.

As schools prepare for full reopening, hospitals rethink hospital design and businesses return from remote working, the OneVue platform provides the tools and resources needed to create an efficient and safe facility – whether monitoring environmental conditions, relaying mass communications during critical situations or just simply keeping everyone in sync and on time.

- **OneVue Sense™** provides secure, medical-grade wireless sensors to continuously monitor conditions such as freezer and refrigerator temperature, humidity and air pressure, water leak and contact closure
- **OneVue Notify®** delivers visual alerts for critical situations, general messaging for day-to-day communications, while also providing synchronized time
- **OneVue Sync™** offers synchronized clocks for unified timekeeping across entire campuses and facilities

Primex continues to invest in product research and emerging technologies to improve efficiencies and increase safety to help facilities meet compliance and safety requirements. We are continually looking to strengthen our strategic alliances. **Join us** on our journey!

www.primexinc.com

AVer

Meet AVer's New Cameras

AVer is excited to announce the launch of our new series of cameras with intelligent built-in lighting - the CAM130 4K Camera and VB130 4K Video Bar. The AVer CAM130 & VB130 pack a full suite of professional features into simple, portable devices perfect for executives or working from home users. Additionally, the innovative CAM130 & VB130 have been granted official hardware certification from leading communications provider Zoom Video Communications and are compatible with Microsoft Teams. VB130 features an adjustable 5-level fill lighting combined with an automatic light sensor provide the perfect amount of light to illuminate a workspace.

www.averusa.com/products

SurgeX

Learn More about SurgeX

Throughout its history, SurgeX has been a power quality innovator that provides a solid AC power foundation to ensure electronic equipment is being supplied with clean electricity to perform properly. Our patented Advanced Series Mode® technology eliminates surge energy without producing harmful side effects such as ground contamination or common mode disturbances.

What's in it for you? Simply, peace of mind. SurgeX combines true surge elimination, EMI/RFI filtration and unsurpassed analytical software to help businesses control the unstable nature of the power grid. When SurgeX products are part of your design, equipment error-codes, reboots, downtime and service calls are drastically reduced.

Learn more **here**.

Winsted

Meet Winsted's Paramount Technology Credenzas

Winsted's Paramount Technology Credenzas are designed to organize and protect your electronics. Paramount is an elegant, functional solution that integrates nicely into any boardroom, conference room, control room or any other high-tech space. These versatile credenzas are modular, reconfigurable and expandable to meet your changing technology needs today and tomorrow. The standard one, two and three bay credenzas can be combined to create larger configurations.

Paramount Technology Credenzas Feature:

- High-Pressure Laminate Top Panel with Durable Rubber Edge
- Optional Versa-Trak Monitor Mounting System
- Front and Rear 14U Tapped Rack Rails in Each Bay
- Optional 11U Pullout/Swivel Rack
- Vented Base Allows for Optional 3" Casters and 120mm Fans
- Top Includes Six 50mm Fans and Cable Management Throughout
- Rear Panel Included - Optional Locking Front Doors Available
- Black Laminated Side Panels or Optional Steel Side Panels

winsted.com

Xilica

Xilica Gio Series

Xilica introduces the Gio® family of networked endpoints that bridge personal devices to installed AV systems. The series features three Dante interface products for connectivity within collaborative and reconfigurable AV environments. All three interfaces drive greater adoption of bring-your-own-meeting (BYOM) strategies, and extend the use of installed AV systems through wireless and digital connectivity.

Xilica's Gio USB and Gio Bluetooth address corporate and education environments, bridging the gap between peripherals (laptops, tablets, smartphones) and networked AV systems. Xilica Gio XLR accommodates larger spaces and special events, extending installed AV systems over IP across multiple rooms. All products represent Xilica's latest advances in IT standards adoption.

xilica.com

SENNHEISER

Sennheiser

Sennheiser TeamConnect Ceiling 2 – Now with TruVoicelift

The Sennheiser TeamConnect Ceiling 2, with its patented automatic dynamic beamforming technology, was already a leader in conference room audio technology. Now, with the addition of **TruVoicelift** and advanced zone control, TeamConnect Ceiling 2 is the best solution for both conferencing and in-room audio for classrooms, lecture halls, boardrooms and more.

What is TruVoicelift?

Unlike other brands, Sennheiser believes that there's more to voicelift than just another application on a long list. Our activatable and configurable algorithm behind TruVoicelift, in combination with the most flexible beamform and advanced zone control, distinguish the most powerful beamforming microphone on the market.

Features

TruVoicelift is Sennheiser's interpretation of the voicelift function. TruVoicelift allows the customer to significantly increase speech amplification on-site in the meeting room and gives the option to get significantly louder than other solutions.

With 5 advanced exclusion zones, the customer has 100% flexibility and can precisely define the position of noise sources to be ignored by the beam tracking (vertically and horizontally) in a new, visually powerful 3D optic via Sennheiser Control Cockpit.

100% control by setting a particular area of a room as priority zone so that whenever someone in this zone is talking, they are given priority over any others that are talking in the room.

Learn more about TruVoicelift at **www.truvoicelift.com**.

For more information on TeamConnect Ceiling 2, as well as Wireless technology, Campus-wide audio and other topics, see our **new series of online seminars**.

Herman ProAV

More Screen Time!

Now that Herman is part of the ADI Global family one of the many ways we're bigger, better and stronger together is the addition of **displays and projectors** to our vast line of products. Now you can order top brand displays and projectors directly from Herman, along with all your other product needs.

We're committed to being your trusted partner and full-service distributor. Not only can you consolidate your display and projector orders with other products, but through Herman Integration Services, we can even handle the installation for you. Herman has everything you need to Achieve More!

Herman is offering FREE SHIPPING on display and projector orders of $2,500 or more. Contact your Herman sales rep or email **sales@hermanproav.com** for details.

Learn more.

Cleerline Technology Group

Fiber Optic Training & New 24 Strand Products at the Cleerline SSF™

Cleerline Academy is open now. Cleerline Technology Group has launched a new educational initiative: the **Cleerline SSF™ Training Academy**. This online training platform is designed to help system integrators, low voltage contractors, electricians, specifiers, and end users design and install their own fiber-based systems.

The first course available at the Cleerline Academy, the Level 1 Cleerline SSF™ Certification, provides a basic introduction to fiber optic technology. Topics cover the basics of fiber specification and cable construction, common connector types, and more.

Made up of seven short modules, each under 10 minutes, the Level 1 Certification is easy to fit into a busy schedule. In addition to each video lesson, resource videos and downloads are included. Assessments are provided after each module, with a final cumulative assessment at the end of the course. Best of all, this course is completely free!

Future courses will delve into more advanced topics, including testing and link budget development. Register and learn more at **www.cleerlineacademy.com**.

In product news, Cleerline's popular **Rugged Micro Distribution** and **Armored Corrugated Steel Direct Burial** (ACS) cables are now available in 24 strand single mode configurations. Each cable maintains the same outer diameter as our existing Rugged Micro (6.1 mm) or ACS (9.0 mm) configurations while distributing 24 fibers! Contact CTG today for more information.

Biamp

Hybrid Learning for K-12 Classrooms with Devio

Devio is a cost-effective and easy-to-deploy solution for K-12 hybrid and remote classrooms. The Devio SCR Series ensures every student, either in class or at home, can clearly hear and understand classroom instruction. Included with Devio, our Parlé tabletop or ceiling microphones automatically track and mix voices intelligently from anywhere in the room — even as the teacher walks around.

Learn more

Introducing Biamp Launch

By automating the room tuning and commissioning process, Biamp Launch guarantees a consistently great audio experience in any space with remarkable speed.

Watch the video

SYNNEX Corporation

The VISUAL*Solv* Value

Demand for robust, immersive, and safe experiences in commercial, institutional, and public spaces is driving the need for cohesive technology solutions in digital signage, pro AV, and physical security. SYNNEX VISUAL*Solv* unites the industry's top AV, IT, and CE technologies to help you build the cross-functional solutions your customers need. With comprehensive capabilities covering everything from pre-sales design to integration, installation, and post-sale support, our experience advisors enable you to expand your reach. SYNNEX VISUAL*Solv's* industry-certified experts provide additional guidance and support through a personalized training curriculum. Leverage our broadline capabilities, technical expertise, and subject matter experts to diversify your business.

We're making investments daily to provide you with the resources and tools needed to support your business. Engage with our team today at **visualsolv@synnex.com**.

SONY

Sony

Learn More About Sony

As a world leader in imaging technologies Sony is committed to providing innovative products that connect people in new and different ways. Our flexible and efficient AV solutions integrate easily into existing infrastructures and deliver smarter, more effective communications with superior image quality, to engage and inspire students, colleagues, and customers, no matter where they are.

Our large-screen display solutions include BRAVIA 4K Professional Displays and videowalls, 3LCD BrightEra Laser Projectors, Native 4K Pro SXRD Projectors, and Crystal LED Direct-view Modular Displays, for breathtaking visuals. High-quality remote camera systems include high-quality PTZ, POV and BOX Cameras, and AI-Based Video Analytics with powerful software options create dynamic and cost-effective presentations. Our award-winning Beamforming Ceiling Microphone uses speech reinforcement and recording technologies for stable volume and clear sound. Let us help you transform your communications.

Recent additions to the B2B family include innovations in premium direct-view LED: the modular Crystal LED C-series featuring high contrast and B-series featuring high brightness. Sony also strengthened its display portfolio with two versatile new choices – the 100-inch FW-100BZ40J and 32-inch FW-32BZ30J.

Sony continues to stay in front of our customers, delivering these new launches, and product updates through our popular AV Webinar Series called **Tech Tuesdays**. Another exciting stop for information is Sony's Architect, Consultant and Engineer **"ACE" Portal** which was designed to maximize time and productivity on-site, providing the tools and technical feedback for your opportunities. We're always happy to hear from and connect with the industry so please visit us **here**.

Visit: **pro.sony/Avsolutions**

Axis Communications

Axis Communications - Network Audio Speaker Updates, Mobile App and Webinar

With the latest firmware update, Axis network speakers now offer additional features including two-way talk back, adjustable latency and equalization presets for improved sound clarity and natural communication.

Also, check out the new mobile application, **AXIS Audio Remote**, which allows you to conveniently record and broadcast announcements right from your mobile phone to your Axis network speakers on the same Wi-Fi network.

For more information on how to add audio and video to your future projects, register for access to the webinar: **Expand your business potential with network audio**

Check out our **app**.

Check out this **webinar**.

Solutions360

Q360 Forecasting Dashboards

Traditionally, dashboards have been designed to give you a quick visual of KPI's that have occurred. This backwards analysis is then used for making business decisions affecting the future. There is an inherent gap in that model that introduces risk in decision making. Q360 gives you dashboards that show you the future.

Q360 is a unified application that consolidates your data into one platform. This allows you to leverage that information to look forward, to forecast and predict. Taking what we have done, we can take that information along with what is planned and give you a very accurate picture of where you are going.

Dashboards being fed by day-to-day and planned business activity ensures they are always up to date and changes in your business will be reflected in your view of the future.

Where are you going?

- **Cashflow** forecasting using project billing and material planning dates, service contract invoicing, collections performance, and projected fixed costs this dashboard shows you your cashflow for up to two years out.
- **Labor Capacity** forecasting that factors in your labor categories and actual staff availability in each role overlayed project labor plans shows you over and under labor capacity over time.
- **Project Backlog** forecasting shows you your backlog burn rate, factor this in with sales bookings and you can see your ability to deliver.

Bring all these views into one, real-time dashboard with interactivity and you have the big levers you need to navigate your business through challenging times.

solutions360.com

BrightSign

BrightSign Mobile Enables Reliable Media Player Connectivity Where Internet Access is a Challenge

BrightSign, the global market leader in digital signage media players, announces **BrightSign Mobile** as an affordable new solution to easily connect media players to the cloud where traditional methods of network connectivity are difficult to achieve.

The solution is available as an accessory to BrightSign players that includes a low-profile USB modem ($120) with an installed SIM card. Customers have a choice of affordable data plans specially designed for digital signage and exclusive to BrightSign.

See **https://www.brightsign.biz/digital-signage-products/mobile** for more information.

Kramer

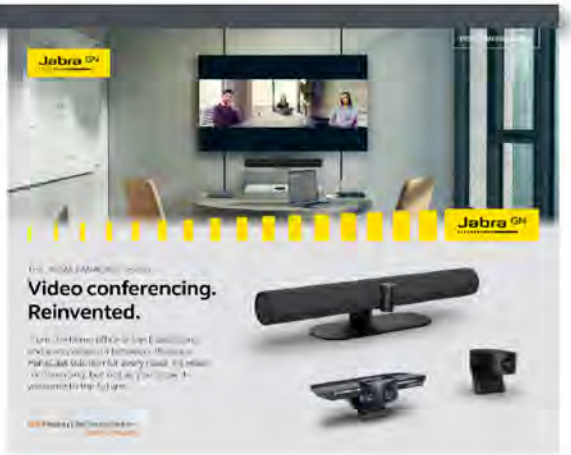
Kramer Welcomes New Director of Business Development, U.S. Government & Military

Kramer Electronics announces David Bromberg as Director of Business Development, US Government & Military.

Bromberg brings more than 25 years of government and commercial AV/IT industry experience. He is responsible for leading government market initiatives at Federal, State, and local levels working with Kramer's Sales and Technical teams across the nation.

"I am both honored and excited to come on board with Kramer," Bromberg says. "The Kramer brand and reputation for putting out top-of-class solutions are well known throughout our industry, and I look forward to bringing these solutions to our government clients."

kramerav.com/us



Jabra

Learn About Jabra's PanaCast 50

Introducing smarter video conferencing from Jabra with the new PanaCast 50. With the PanaCast 50, users can achieve a unique 180° field of view without distortion and keeps everyone in the picture at a safe distance. Safety Capacity and Room Usage Insights generates anonymous room occupancy data for all your meeting rooms at once.

In addition, uniquely advanced system architecture and built-in dual Edge AI processors powers a range of intelligent features. Network-connected system enables easy remote management and data delivery and real-time whiteboard streaming for more inclusive remove collaboration adds to productivity.

Plus, eight beamforming microphones ensure crystal clear conversations and help minimize unnecessary background noise. Jabra PanaCast 50 has plug-and-play connectivity making for instant collaboration, and users can choose from a wall mount, table stand or VESA compatible screen mount.

The PanaCast 50 is compatible with Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Teams Rooms, Zoom, and Zoom Rooms, and optimized for all leading UC platforms.

Find out more at **https://www.jabra.com/panacast50**.

HELLO NSCA SOLUTION PROVIDERS!

Hello NSCA Solution Providers! Want to communicate directly with NSCA member companies or optimize your platform?

Contact NSCA Channel Partner Manager Max Johnson at mjohnson@nsca.org or 319.861.8629.

SPONSOR CONTENT

Riding the Wave

By Randy Stearns

As the economy and the integration market rebound from the pandemic, it's expected to be a wild ride. You'll need skilled labor, of course, but the steps you take to improve productivity are just as impactful.

The current economy is like an uncoiled spring, recently released by the impact of vaccinations and relaxing COVID-19 restrictions. The economy is roaring back. There's so much pent-up demand that every sector of the economy will experience boom times in the months (and likely years) to come. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects U.S. GDP growth at 6.4% (6% globally) in 2021, which would be the second-highest watermark in more than a half-century.

Hold on! The Roaring '20s (2.0) are back, and it's going to be a wild ride.

Is your business prepared to ride the wave? Most economists predict that it'll keep rolling into the early 2030s, guided by a secular bull market and driven by two converging phenomena:

1. The deployment stage of the Fifth Techno-Economic Revolution, the Age of Information and Telecommunications (aka the Digital Age) that began in 1971, resulting in an extraordinary productivity surge.
2. Millennials (the nation's largest generation) entering prime working years. The two main contributors to economic expansion are growth in workforce size and growth in that workforce's productivity (output per hour worked).

Each morning, my Oura Ring app reports to me in terms of a metric it calls "Readiness" (to take on the day). It constructs this metric by combining the quality of my sleep with my general health and fitness vital signs. Using the Oura Ring as a parable, what is your company's "readiness" to take advantage of the years of economic expansion that lie ahead? Like the broader economy, your business will require two key building blocks to ride the wave: a sufficient-sized workforce and a means of increasing productivity to support growing demand for your services.

If talented individuals come your way, grab them—but also seek out every opportunity to refine business processes and tools instead of focusing solely on finding additional staff (or complaining about not being able to do so).

Emphasis on Productivity

Industry leaders generally agree that a lack of available skilled labor is the primary impediment to business growth. Paradoxically, for argument's sake, I'm going to take a different point of view. After running a systems integration business in the San Francisco Bay Area, where employee costs rank amongst the highest in the world—and the draw of high-flying Silicon Valley start-ups preoccupied the minds of most tech-savvy professionals—I had little choice but to look to productivity gains to increase project throughput and support a growing project backlog. The Japanese concept of Kaizen (continuous improvement) ruled the day; hiring became an option of last resort.

Further, like Henry Ford with his assembly line and Dr. Izumi Tabata with HIIT training, the businessman in me understood that efficiency was the best path to better bottom-line results. Standardization followed by systemization and a continual refinement of process, combined with the exploitation of productivity tools (software), leads to dramatic improvement in throughput. And, most importantly, when business operations are streamlined, bottom-line growth is proportionate to top-line growth (which, I'll note, is far from guaranteed when heads are added to solve the problem of increasing demand).

So, what's the bottom line? Presuming that you're inclined to take advantage of the expanding market, grab talented individuals when they come your way. But, instead of focusing on finding additional staff or complaining about not being able to do so, I encourage you to seek out every opportunity to refine business processes and tools.

Your clients and industry partners will notice because your work is better planned, more expediently executed, and more predictable. Your employees will be happier and more grateful because they'll feel more in control and more productive. Most importantly, you and the stakeholders will delight in seeing a healthier, more sustainable bottom line.

Randy Stearns is the CEO of D-Tools, an industry-leading software solutions provider. Previously, he owned an electronic systems integration business in the San Francisco Bay Area.

WANT MORE?

Download a free trial to learn how to standardize, systematize, and streamline your business process.

d-tools

Excellence in Product Innovation Awards: 2021 Winners

EPI 2021
Excellence in Product Innovation
NSCA

These seven products were recognized with Excellence in Product Innovation (EPI) Awards during this year's Business & Leadership Conference.

Each year, NSCA teams up with *Commercial Integrator* to present manufacturers with Excellence in Product Innovation Awards across seven categories. This recognition program honors products that have a profound impact on systems integrators.

Announced at annual Business & Leadership Conferences, the winning products are chosen by a panel of judges, including members of NSCA's Emerging Technologies Committee. We adapted information from each winner's award application to help you learn more about each product.

Here are this year's winners!

Category: **Ease of Customization**

Shure Audio Ecosystem, Shure Incorporated

This complete Shure Audio Ecosystem is flexible across system architectures in all room types and ensures that end-users have high-quality, unifying AV experiences across an enterprise—regardless of location. By providing various product options, Shure gives integrators the opportunity to create solutions that are a perfect fit for customers' needs.

SHURE

Category: **New Revenue Potential**

Fusion Professional, SureCall

Fusion Professional is the most customizable home booster, featuring full automation and control, to give customers the best experience possible as they work from home based on their needs. It also allows integrators to add unique value due to excellent customizability. With the highest system gain in its class, combined with the strongest outdoor Yagi antenna available, the Fusion Professional boosts voice and 4G LTE data signals on 4G and 5G phones and devices in challenging signal environments.

SureCall®

NSCA
23rd ANNUAL
Business & Leadership CONFERENCE

WANT MORE?

Read and watch more about the Business & Leadership Conference here.

Category: **Technology Platform**

Atmosphere, AtlasIED

AtlasIED's digital audio platform, Atmosphere™, sets a new standard for digital audio control, management, and distribution through the integration of innovative technologies, including touchless controls, artificial intelligence, and automation. Comprising these technologies is a complete suite of products, including digital signal processors, amplifiers, graphical user interfaces, programming software, and controls. Designed and engineered to work together seamlessly, the suite minimizes training time and installation, configuration, and programming headaches.

Category: **Recurring Revenue Potential**

CXDetect, Liberty AV Solutions

CXDetect simplifies remote system and device management support with a single user interface for UC service and management while drastically decreasing service and system downtime. This tool replaces five or more UC management tools, such as CUCM, TMS, RealPresence Clariti, Zoom Dashboard, Logitech Sync, and other network monitoring tools.

Category: **Retrofit/Installer Friendly**

Tensioned Designer Contour Electrol, Da-Lite

The Tensioned Designer Contour® Electrol® is a ceiling- or wall-mounted electric screen offering simple installation with the benefit of a small housing. A variety of finishes and options make this a seamless addition to any room. Offering all the benefits of an electric screen with the flexibility of wire-free installation, it's an excellent alternative for challenging wired screen installations.

Category: **Trailblazing Innovation**

Squid, SurgeX

A streamlined solution for residential, commercial, and resimercial AV installations, Squid combines AC and DC outlets with advanced surge protection, power conditioning, boxed network control, power management, and analytical software in an extremely compact form factor so integrators no longer need to install one product for AC, another for DC, and a third to monitor and control the power environment. Squid supports more projects than other devices in its category, offering a flexible, competitively priced, compact power management solution ideal for any AV installation.

Category: **Grand Prize Winner**

PacketAV Duet Wallplate Encoder w/ Bluetooth®, Visionary Solutions

The new PacketAV Duet Wallplate Encoder is the world's first HDMI over IP wallplate with built-in Bluetooth connectivity. PacketAV Duet Wallplate Encoders provide powerful 4K UHD Video and Dante™/AES67 audio over a single Gigabit Ethernet port, now with built-in bi-directional Bluetooth® wireless audio connectivity. The PacketAV Duet Wallplate Encoder is the only AV over IP wallplate available that fits into a U.S. electrical box mud ring without modification.

Learn more about our Grand Prize Winner in this short Q&A with Visionary Solutions COO Scott Freshman.

STEPPING UP During the Pandemic

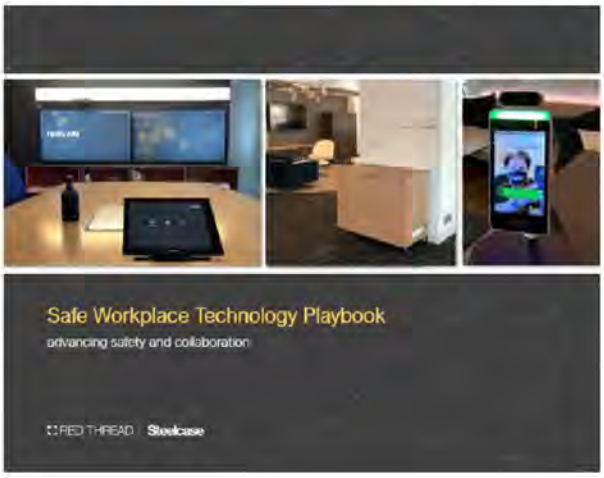
These five NSCA members earned Stepping Up Awards this year for their remarkable work during the pandemic.

We changed things up a little bit with our 2021 integrator awards program. As integrators struggled with unique pandemic-related business challenges, it didn't seem right to stick with our regularly scheduled programming. Instead of honoring members with our annual Excellence in Business Awards, we recognized five Stepping Up Award winners at this year's Business & Leadership Conference (BLC).

Because the time period leading up to the awards was anything but typical, we decided it would be difficult to judge integrators on things like employee engagement and talent development (our typical Excellence in Business categories). "In the face of the pandemic, NSCA saw its members set and strive to reach new goals and rise to the occasion when faced with daunting business challenges," says NSCA Executive Director Tom LeBlanc. "This year, we decided to recognize companies that stepped up by honoring them at the **2021 Business & Leadership Conference**, where the theme was 'Stepping Up When It Counts.' "

Meet NSCA's Stepping Up Award winners ...

Category: **Ease of Customization** *Red Thread, Boston*



Red Thread's Safe Workplace Technology Playbook is provided to customers to help them manage safe, productive work environments post-pandemic.

"Agility" is a buzzword often used in the integration market, but the need for NSCA members to be agile became a lot more urgent when COVID-19 hit in early 2020.

Some things were obvious:

- **Customers' needs and priorities were changing in a big way**
- **Getting customers' employees back to work required rethinking office spaces**
- **Most integration companies needed to approach their businesses, the market, and their customers differently than they did pre-pandemic**

Less obvious, however, were the steps integrators needed to take to put themselves in a position to provide great value to customers—and to succeed. In our opinion, Red Thread took the right steps.

"The first thing we did was gather a bunch of influencers in the Boston market," says John Mitton, CTO and VP of the Audiovisual Group for Red Thread. It included VPs of facilities for large corporations, property managers, building owners, and university leaders. "We led a series of roundtables to talk to them about what they saw in the near future."

Based on those discussions, Red Thread created strategies in three categories:

1. **Now:** What types of solutions should Red Thread offer companies that wanted or needed to get back into the workplace ASAP?
2. **Near:** In what ways could Red Thread impact existing space by providing technology to support organizations as they returned to work?
3. **Far:** Red Thread realized that many organizations would be indefinitely impacted by the pandemic. "We were starting to see early on that this was going to be a real inflection point in the way people look at space and technology and how they come together," Mitton says.

With that information, "we formed an internal team of cross-functional people—individuals from the [Audiovisual] Group, our Furniture Group, and our Architectural Products Group," he says.

Red Thread examined return-to-work options across these timespans and sought actionable solutions that could be implemented immediately and over time. The result was an integration company pivoting very quickly to develop several solutions to support a post-COVID-19 workplace. This included a Workplace Re-Entry Program guide to help customers return to work; a Safe Workplace Technology Playbook, which helps customers manage safe, productive work environments; and a Workplace Transformation Interactive Budget Tool to help customers select products and optimize spaces for post-pandemic work.

STEPPING UP Awards 2021

NSCA YOUR VOICE • RESOURCE • ADVISOR

Amid the pandemic, NSCA replaced its annual Excellence in Business Awards with the Stepping Up Awards to recognize companies that had positive reactions to pandemic-related challenges.

Category: **Customer Experience** *Forward Edge, Cincinnati*

Employees at Forward Edge are adamant that customer service is always their highest priority—and nobody doubts that. But the K-12-focused integrator managed to elevate its customer service even more during the pandemic.

The company saw many of its customers struggling to adjust to a remote learning environment and responded in several ways. Forward Edge's team of technology integration specialists pulled together an expansive library of distance learning resources and tools for districts to use to adjust to online learning.

"At the end of the day, our role is to provide technology and solutions in education to produce a better student outcome in the classroom," says COO Chip Logan.

The company offered a best practices guide and instructional "happy hour" webinars. It even held virtual office hours every other day for teachers to ask questions about issues related to data privacy, training, and engaging with students over digital media.

Meanwhile, Forward Edge's Edge•U online micro-credentialing program helped educators continue professional development during the pandemic—specifically helping them integrate technology into the classroom (or virtual classroom) by learning and implementing new digital tools.

When the company recognized that a lack of reliable WiFi was a challenge for many schools, it pursued the concept of supplying WiFi via school parking lots to students and teachers who struggled with limited access. Exterior WiFi APs allow students and teachers to connect during school activities at all times of the day. WiFi coverage can be placed in parking lots or in easily accessible outdoor areas and extends in all directions with an omnidirectional antenna (barring physical obstructions). For many school districts across the region, this plan greatly expanded community WiFi access.

> **"At the end of the day, our role is to provide technology and solutions in education to produce a better student outcome in the classroom."**
>
> —Forward Edge COO Chip Logan on why the company created resources to help teachers with remote learning during the pandemic.

While Forward Edge's goal was to provide great customer service during the pandemic, it seems like the business outcome will last much longer than COVID-19. "From a stickiness standpoint and doing what's best for that customer, the impact was huge," Logan says. "Our goal is to retain these customers for life. When you go above and beyond, I don't think it could have been a better experience for us and the customer."

Category: **Achievement** *SIGNET Electronic Systems, Norwell, MA*

It's not that SIGNET Electronic Systems didn't have second thoughts about launching its 1,200-square-foot network operations center (NOC) and tiered remote monitoring and service program during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Construction began in February 2020 and the Norwell, MA-based integration company did consider halting construction when the pandemic hit. "But we decided to move forward, and it was a great decision," says Bradford Caron, president at SIGNET.

During pre-pandemic times, a well-planned investment in a service-based offering would certainly seem logical. Amid the pandemic, however, it's bold—but it paid off in unique ways.

SIGNET President Bradford Caron checks out activities in the company's new network operations center (NOC).

The Remote Smart services offered through the dedicated facility allows SIGNET to provide remote monitoring and as-needed troubleshooting to vital communication and security technologies—often proactively addressing technology issues prior to developing into a system failure.

This allowed SIGNET to remain extremely—and remotely—connected to its customers during the pandemic and tap into a demand for touchless support. "We had several high-profile clients— hospitals, court systems, prisons—that were hesitant about giving us access to their network in the past," Caron explains. "But the pandemic opened their eyes because they were having issues and we couldn't be [physically] in their facilities. Remote Smart [helped customers] see the significance of what we were providing, and they would open up their networks for us."

Meanwhile, SIGNET launched two tiers of Remote Start service—Remote Response Services (reactive support) and Proactive Monitoring Services (proactive support) —which created new business opportunities aligned with new value for customers.

As Caron explains, SIGNET created SKUs that allow it to add Remote Start to existing service agreements. Customers can choose the tier. "We are adding revenue dollars onto every agreement that we have automatically."

Meanwhile, Caron says the NOC and Remote Smart offerings have elevated the company in other ways. SIGNET has always had highly qualified technicians. The business model around remote monitoring requires a more IT- and network-trained staff. It also necessitates high cybersecurity standards. As such, "it opens up a whole new pool of staffing—that whole world of the networking and IT industry," says Caron.

Category: **Employee Engagement** *Integrated Security Technologies, Inc., Waipahu, HI*

NSCA members tend to put their customers first, and that's a good thing. During the pandemic, the value that integration companies provided to their customers skyrocketed. More than ever, organizations are leaning on integration partners to help them improve communication and provide safe work environments.

For integration company leaders, however, the tricky part is balancing that "customer-first" approach with being sympathetic to the fact that employees are also going through a pandemic, dealing with health concerns, struggling to protect their families, and often generally stressed out!

The leadership at Integrated Security Technologies, Inc. went above and beyond to demonstrate appreciation for employees during the pandemic. Like many integrators, Hawaii-based IST is part of its community's "essential workforce." In this integrator's case, that meant tackling projects in hospitals where the COVID-19 virus was present; it also meant mixing with people not wearing masks or properly socially distancing, says President Christine Lanning. "We had to hustle to keep ourselves stocked with PPE so we could work," she says.

Mission-critical team members at IST found ways to support one another during the pandemic.

The IST team was cognizant that being able to work and keep payroll going was "a blessing," Lanning says. "There was a bit of guilt that added to our stress as we watched other familiar doors close—some forever. But the essential work of protecting our clients and their facilities continued for us."

Along the way, and through the hot pandemic summer in Hawaii, unanticipated obstacles arose. "We didn't anticipate the heat rashes that crawled across our mask-covered faces," Lanning writes in her Stepping Up Award submission. "We didn't know sanitizer bottles could catch fire. The constant donning, removing, and redonning of PPE felt relentless, sometimes suffocating, and the hourly work stoppage for handwashing seemed to mark each day's movement with ever-longer and even-deeper cracks among the folds of skin on our raw hands."

The adversity led to IST leadership and employees looking after one another—supporting their families' businesses, finding ways to stay connected, you name it. More than anything, IST committed to its employees, its employees committed to the company, and the company committed to its community.

Category: **Community Outreach** *ClearTech, Altadena, CA*

For ClearTech, the impact of the pandemic extends far beyond its business and employees: The integration company felt an obligation to expand its support of the local population. When Christina De Bono founded ClearTech, it was with the understanding that businesses are integral to the health of their communities.

During the pandemic, ClearTech partnered with the Western Service Workers Association (WSWA), a free and voluntary self-help membership organization that provides essential benefits—including emergency food, clothing, preventive medical care, legal advice, and more—to low-income service, domestic, in-home care, part-time, and temporary workers throughout the region.

Obviously, 2020 was a calamitous year for low-income workers. In Fall 2020, ClearTech participated in the WSWA's Fall Back-to-School Drive. Despite dealing with their own lockdown situations, every member of the ClearTech team worked together to gather, assemble, and distribute more than 200 backpacks and school supplies to support families in need.

During the holidays, ClearTech provided toys for children of WSWA families, enabling parents to redirect scarce funds toward more dire expenses like food, rent, and utilities. Normally, this drive concludes with a party for the kids. Because that wasn't possible in 2020, the ClearTech team threw themselves into the toy drive. In addition to providing age-appropriate gifts to 50 families, they even provided wrapping paper.

Despite dealing with their own lockdown situations, every member of the ClearTech team worked together to gather, assemble, and distribute more than 200 backpacks and school supplies to support families in need.

ClearTech also helped struggling small businesses that were WSWA supporters apply for PPP loans.

In addition, ClearTech provided conferencing equipment and technical support to WSWA and eight sister community organizations. None of these entities had resources to transition to remote work on their own, but—thanks to ClearTech—they were able to carry out vital work in underserved communities without interruption during the pandemic's darkest moments.

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STEPPING UP Awards 2021 NSCA

SUCCESSION PLANNING: NSCA Walks the Walk

As long-time NSCA leader Chuck Wilson transitions to a reduced schedule, the trade association used its own succession planning advice to come up with a new strategy. *By Tom LeBlanc*

Prior to joining NSCA as the director of industry outreach in January 2020, I was very familiar with the trade association.

As editor of one of the industry's well-known trade magazines for a decade, I also knew NSCA's long-time Executive Director and CEO Chuck Wilson.

Like most people in the industry, I was impressed with NSCA's commitment to providing valuable resources, consultation, business conferences, and advocacy to support integrators. In the back of my mind, however (like many people), I was aware that Chuck's close, personal connection to NSCA's resources, hands-on consultations, conference contributions, and tireless government affairs work wasn't sustainable.

Everybody has their limits—even Chuck.

Succession planning is among the many business challenges NSCA helps members tackle. Most integrators are extremely reliant on their principals, but, eventually, these folks need to retire or take a step back from day-to-day operations. Creating a successful transition plan takes work.

About two-and-a-half years ago, NSCA found itself in a similar situation. Chuck, whose industry experience and expertise contributed to nearly all of NSCA's deliverables, was eyeing a reduction in his work schedule. Not retirement, but a focused role that would allow him to work more reasonable hours and dedicate time to volunteer initiatives.

Around that time, NSCA also launched its Leadership Development Council (LDC). The group, comprised of Chuck and current and former NSCA board members, created a plan for an orderly, logical leadership transition plan.

"I'm not following in Chuck's footsteps. Instead, as Chuck says, 'We've been working together for years—we might as well keep walking side by side for a few more.'"

Inside NSCA's Leadership Transition Plan

The LDC considered several factors—most importantly, the needs of NSCA's constituents. It was determined that a primary measure of success would be to ensure that the organization could maintain its value and relevance to members, regardless of personnel and with minimal disruption to services or programs.

The LDC also laid out a succession timeline:

February 2020: During the Business & Leadership Conference (BLC), Chuck announced an elevated committee and council structure for NSCA. This was pivotal in shifting the burden of NSCA's thought leadership away from Chuck to several focused committees and councils instead.

April 2020: The LDC evaluated all factors to determine a short list of candidates for the executive director role.

Summer 2020: I was identified as the next NSCA executive director. I continued my duties as director of industry outreach through the transition period.

Fall 2020: We accelerated the process of onboarding me to the executive director position. Meetings and "job shadowing" focused not only on day-to-day operations and responsibilities, but also on NSCA's mission and ideals.

February 2021: During the annual NSCA member meeting at BLC, Chuck announced his intention to reduce his role at NSCA so he could focus on the NSCA Education Foundation and Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS K-12), in addition to other volunteer ventures.

March 2021: Employee agreements were rewritten, reviewed by the NSCA board, approved by attorneys, and signed.

May 2021: I assumed the role of executive director while Chuck transitioned to a new role as CEO and strategic advisor to the board of directors.

NSCA Leadership's Road Ahead

As CEO and the driving force behind NSCA for four decades, Chuck remains NSCA's leader. My job is to move as many leadership tasks off his plate as possible so he can pursue his passions . . . including NSCA.

For approximately 20 hours each week, Chuck focuses on the NSCA-related activities where he can make the most impact. If anyone deserves the right to take a step back, it's the person who has stood up for this industry more than anyone else.

I am proud to serve as NSCA's executive director. We have a strong team led by Director of Operations Teresa Solorio and Director of Business Resources Mike Abernathy. Our collective goal is to elevate NSCA employees, the NSCA board, and NSCA's committees and councils to raise the bar even higher when it comes to our industry-leading resources, consultation, business conferences, and advocacy.

I'm not following in Chuck's footsteps. Instead, as Chuck says, "We've been working together for years—we might as well keep walking side by side for a few more."

Tom LeBlanc is Executive Director at NSCA. Contact him at tleblanc@nsca.org.

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