



4 STRATEGIES

to Successfully Sell to Corporate IT

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Introduction

The overlap between AV and IT is now more pronounced than ever. These historically independent functions are beginning to merge in ways most people didn't expect. AV manufacturers and integrators still want to show off the latest and greatest products. IT is still interested in providing the best solutions at the lowest cost. But the ways that these two groups interact from this point forward has fundamentally changed for good.

AV products continue to evolve to better integrate with existing corporate networks and other systems, thus challenging systems integrators to demonstrate knowledge and understanding when interacting with IT professionals. For an AV professional to appear credible you'll need build fluency in the language of IT to ensure more effective and efficient interactions with current and prospective customers.

Additionally, you must be proficient in modern IT principles and practices, multi-functional teams, and industry standard technologies in order to integrate them into new AV systems. This paper presents four strategies that will help you build longer-lasting, more profitable customer relationships.

> **6** people

The size of an average buying team is approximately six people. Adding even more of a challenge, those numbers fluctuate in consideration of various purchase types (networking, cloud computing, big data, etc.), making the sales process significantly more nuanced and complex.ⁱⁱ

IT Buying Team Size

Reported Size of Buying Team for Major Tech Purchases



Source: IDG Enterprise Role & Influence of the Technology Decision-Maker Study, 2014

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1. Learn Who's Who on the IT Team and Speak to Their Interests

There is no single IT buyer. When you sell corporate AV solutions, you'll be dealing with an IT team—each with his own interests. (Hint: Not all of these people are interested in the network.)

Consider that approximately 96% of all technology purchasing decisions are now made with input from more than one person, with the size of the company often dictating how many people comprise the decision-making machine.ⁱ

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For example, if you are talking to the **application manager**, his primary concern will be how your solution integrates with existing software and systems such as contact libraries and management/monitoring software. And just to throw a wrench in your plan, the IT director may not be concerned about how your solution runs on the data network because he doesn't actually want the solution on his corporate network.

That's why it's critical to figure out the responsibilities of each person you'll be meeting with and speak to his interests.

Take a **consultative approach** that demonstrates you understand there are a lot of factors the team must consider. Instead of launching into a description of which network protocols your solution supports, a more consultative approach would be, "I know there are a lot of ways IT teams can handle real-time, uncompressed media – on the corporate network, a separate network or by segmenting the type of media. How do you prefer to integrate media in your company?"

> **50%**

of IT decision makers feel that significant knowledge of network configuration, IT work-flows, and holding any IT-related professional certifications (CompTIA, Cisco CCNA, and others) are important factors when considering selecting an AV integration partner.

Source: QSC IT Poll, May 2015



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Here's a quick summary of some of the more **common personas** you're likely to encounter, to help you get off on the right foot:

Your face time with the IT buying team won't be very long, only about 2.5 hours if you're a non-incumbent vendor, meaning that it's imperative that you build an accurate profile of the IT buying team you're engaging so you can refine the tone and voice of your interactions for maximum impact. It will also be helpful to leverage the expertise of a sales engineer or secondary research to supply them with tailored messaging about the technical details of your solution, compare and contrast against other solution options, and cite previous customer success.

Technical Decision Maker & Priorities

CIO	Leads and innovates IT role in the business, uses IT to create competitive advantage
IT Manager/Director	Sets IT strategy, manages IT department
IT/Network Architect	Designs communications and computer networks
Network Engineer	Sets up and maintains networks
Application Manager	Maintains software applications, ensures integration

Others on the Tech Buying Team

Role:	What they care about:
Business Decision Maker: Line of Business Manager such as Data Storage, Networking, Infrastructure, Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product pricing and deployment costs • How to lower operating costs • Improving operating efficiency • Using technology to increase revenue opportunities
Financial Decision Maker: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VP of Finance • Corporate Controller • CFO • Line of Business Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product/solution acquisition costs • Reducing capital expenditure • ROI
Influencer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line of Business Manager • IT staff including: systems analysts, business analysts, network specialists, IT consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following product research guidelines • Sourcing solutions that make their jobs easier or better • Impressing their boss with product/solution recommendations that meet the business's needs and budgetary constraints

Source: Brown, Jon. "Don't miss the mark with the right technology buyer." TechTarget, 2013.

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2. Don't Settle for Vendor Status; Become a Strategic Partner

Like any customer, IT buyers want to buy from sellers who understand their needs and speak their language. Getting informed about their business model, current technology environment, and industry or vertical trends is an essential first step. And if you're aiming to become more than just a vendor focused on singular transactions—but a strategic partner whose solutions grow and evolve alongside the customer's business—then you need to be acutely aware and in tune with your prospect's expectations.

There's definitely a void to be filled. According to research firm IDG, "Organizations use many vendors; however only one-quarter are considered strategic partners." In the book *Slow Down, Sell Faster*, author Kevin Davis recommends that vendors who want to become strategic partners should:

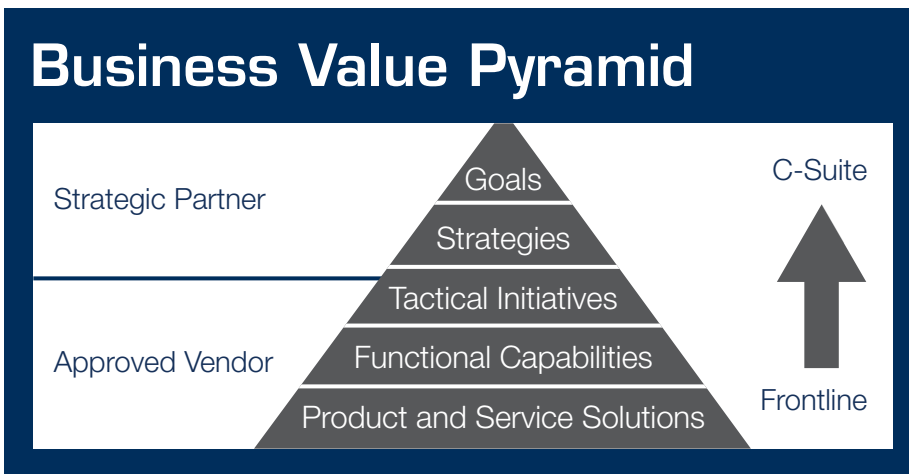
- Do more than understand the customers' needs; they should anticipate them.
- Provoke new thought in their customers. Help customers see the future faster, and in a new and different way.
- Add greater value to solutions and help customers see how to achieve continuous improvement by partnering with them.

> Sales Tips from IT

"If you address my pain you have my attention. If I have no idea what you do I will forget about you."

"When I look at a vendor I focus on the people. I personally view vendors as I would a business partner. This person should give me the resources and tools I need in order to help me in my job role and the company I work for."

"Develop relationships with your clients. Become their business partner. Learn their business, personal and business interests, likes and dislikes, etc. In other words, be their friend. With a solid business relationship comes the sales."



Source: Inbound Sales Network



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It's also important to keep in mind that IT and AV don't think about terms and technical concepts in the same way. Strategic partners consider how IT will interpret words and concepts to avoid misunderstandings or worse, miss delivering on expectations. For example, reliability is a huge concern for IT. However, when an IT person says reliability, what he means is availability or uptime. This is where the **99.999% metric** comes into play. A system that is 99.999% available is as reliable as it gets. When you say the solution you can design and build is reliable, is that what you mean? Are you talking about availability or do you mean something different? Be clear. Also, understand that uptime levels are typically written into service level agreements.

Scalable and future-proof are also criteria high on IT's list when evaluating solutions. Can they add users and rooms as their company grows? How easy is it to add features down the road? In many cases, presenting an option for **preventative maintenance** for the solution may be a good idea. Coming in a few times a year to do health checks on the system is something that may build long-term relationships. Future-proof isn't just about the solution. It is also about your company. Customers look for strategic partners who are financially stable and have a good long-term outlook.

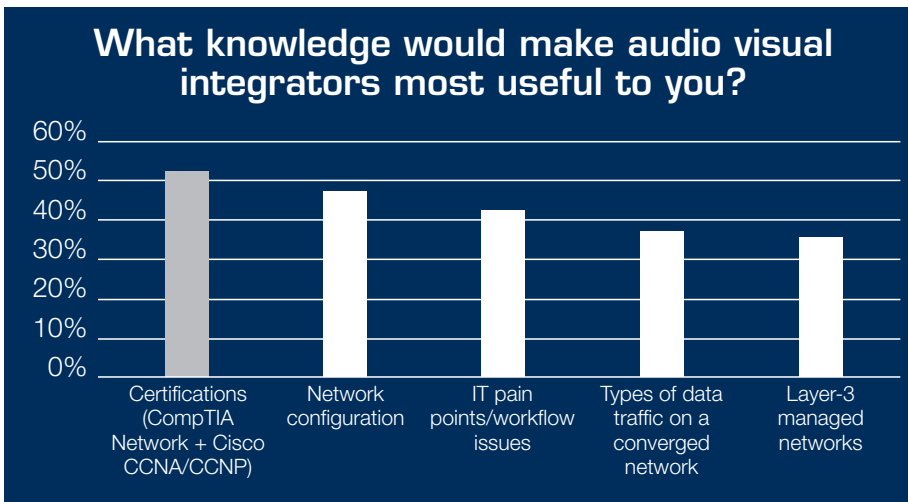
While no one expects you to become an expert in all things IT overnight, you can stand out in the minds of prospective buyers by displaying well-balanced understanding of how their world works. A recent poll conducted by QSC of 150 IT professionals shows that almost 50% of IT decision makers feel that significant knowledge of network configuration and IT work-flows and holding any IT-related professional certifications (CompTIA, Cisco CCNA, and others) are important factors when selecting an AV integration partner.^{vi}

> Sales Tips from IT

“Good partners focus on the main points without fluff. They educate and actually work with you and are willing to listen.”

“Show competence, build trust, and engage. Form a true partnership, one in which the vendor and partner have a mutually beneficial relationship based on trust and working effectively together. And the first step is to get involved.”

Source: Spiceworks IT Panel



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3. Earn Street Cred by Participating in IT Communities

Technology buyers are notoriously skeptical of vendors and providers. They rely heavily on their peers and third party validation when researching solutions. They also like to solve problems on their own—the DIY approach—and seem to turn to vendors only when they've exhausted other options.

A QSC poll of IT professionals found that when asked to plan and deploy audio systems in meeting rooms, 37% will research to figure out a solution, while 29% felt they could handle the project on their own.^{vii} There is a clear hesitancy to look to AV vendors for help.

So how can you break into that trusted circle? By participating in IT communities and social networks.

It may surprise you to learn that 75% of B2B buyers and 84% of C-level/ Vice President (VP) executives surveyed use social media to make purchasing decisions. IDC also found that online professional networks are the number one information preference of buyers in the final stage of the purchase process.^{viii}

And as more millennials get involved in purchasing decisions, social media will be a dominant source for opinions and information about vendors and solutions.



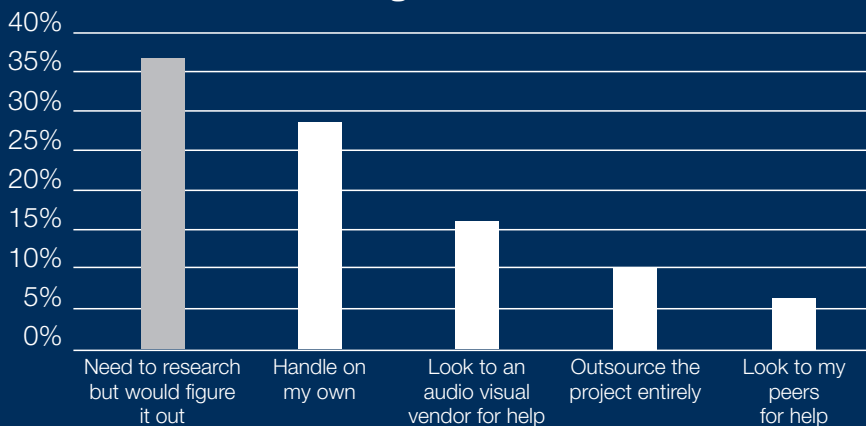
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LinkedIn, in particular, is a valuable social network for B2B buyers. There are hundreds of groups where IT decision makers interact and discuss technology and projects. Other IT communities like SearchUnifiedCommunications.com, Toolbox, and Spiceworks—which has over 6 million IT professionals as members—make it easy for IT professionals to engage with each other and with vendors.

The key to building trust is being helpful. Join groups on LinkedIn and IT communities and engage in conversations and provide answers without pushing an agenda. Build a relationship so that when these IT professionals are ready, they know you're the person they want to work with.

When asked to plan and deploy audio systems in meeting rooms, I will:



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4. Remember that IT Integration Means More Than the Network

The ability to integrate with the IT infrastructure is a source of great pride for many AV vendors. These “IT friendly” products should make it easy for integrators to get in and sell to IT professionals, but in reality, the term “integration” has become ubiquitous and lost much of its originally intended meaning.

In the AV world, “integration” often means working easily with a company’s existing network. But the network is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to contemporary IT purchasing. For IT decision makers, integration also means native-level operability without additional hardware or workarounds. It’s uniting AV systems with applications, operating systems, and IT industry standard monitoring and control consoles. And it’s having the ability to monitor and analyze the health of every system in their environment from a centralized location.

In practical terms, this means that AV solutions in a corporate setting should deliver native network connections as well as turnkey compatibility with IT systems like LDAP, SNMP and SIP softphones. In addition, these solutions must be scalable and provide the flexibility necessary to adapt to the ever-changing needs of your customer’s entire business—not just the network.

No IT department looks the same, and they all structure their operations differently. To develop the type of relationship that results in a long-term business opportunities, take the time to ask questions and get to the very heart of IT’s wants, needs, and concerns.

Conclusion: Helping IT make smart decisions

Today’s IT organizations want more than just components and parts. They want cost-effective systems that address business needs, produce better user experiences, and deliver ROI. New systems and services should connect effortlessly to existing applications and devices, be easily managed, and grow with their business.

IT buyers want all of this, but insist on making smart decisions about how to put all the pieces in place. As an AV professional, you have the ability to help IT teams be more strategic and deliberate in their approach to incorporating audio and video systems into their businesses. It takes some self-education, a lot of preparation to align your selling resources with your prospect’s needs, and AV systems capable of incorporating effortlessly into a company’s existing IT environment.

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About QSC Conferencing Solutions

QSC introduces a new conferencing solution for smaller meeting spaces. Built to deliver native IT system integration, flexible and scalable design, single-SKU simplicity, Intel-powered software-based DSP, and connectivity for BYOD—this is Corporate AV built for IT.

The new conferencing system includes:



Q-SYS™ Core 110f DSP Appliance:

- Software-Based DSP implementation, built on Intel technology
- Class Leading I/O Density: 24 analog I/O, including 8 software-assignable FLEX CHANNEL mic/line level analog audio Inputs *plus* VoIP Softphone, routable AEC, POTS telephone interface & 16 x 16 digital OI via USB



TSC-7t PoE Tabletop Touchscreen:

- Dialing functionality and control of third-party devices on the same device
- Bring your Own Device: Easily interface run UC or web conferencing application with the room's audio system via Micro USB or Bluetooth



SPA Amplifier Series:

- Bridgeable Class D Power, Fanless Design, with Rack-mountable 1U, half rack width enclosure
- Energy Star Qualified
- Up to 60 watts per channel into 4 and 8 ohms
- 2 Channel & 4 Channel Versions available

> To see the QSC conferencing solution in action, contact your local QSC representative or dealer, or visit qsc.com for more information.

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References

- ⁱ Brown, Jon. "Don't miss the mark with the right technology buyer." TechTarget, 2013.
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- ⁱⁱⁱ 2015 TechTarget Media Consumption Report. "Guided by Content: How IT buying teams navigate through the research and purchasing process." TechTarget, 2015.
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- ^{vi} "What makes audio visual integrators most useful to you?" Survey conducted by Spiceworks for QSC Systems, Inc. June, 2015.
- ^{vii} "Social Buying Meets Social Selling: How Trusted Networks Improve the Purchase Experience" IDC, Kathleen Schaub, April 2014.

> About QSC

QSC Systems is an award-winning manufacturer of conferencing solutions for corporate meeting rooms. When you design and integrate projects with our flexible, scalable, and standards-based solutions, you gain an immediate advantage that comes from our IT-centric approach to product development. This is AV built for IT, and it means more than native network connections and compatibility with IT systems like LDAP, SNMP and SIP softphones. It means future-proof designs that easily scale to meet your changing needs, reliable and easily managed conferencing systems, and experiences that exceed your expectations.