Right Here, Right Now:
A Guide to Success With Huddle Spaces

AVI◆SPL®

An AVI-SPL Tech Guide

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Consider how much work can get done in small groups, and you can understand why the word "huddle" has taken hold in describing spaces where groups brainstorm, present content, and work as a unit for quick burst of collaborative productivity. For many companies, integrating huddle spaces into their offices isn't a matter of "whether" but "when."

Wireless, mobile, and desktop technologies that are a staple of the workplace have changed its culture and our expectations of what we can do in and out of the office. Huddle spaces (which we're using to denote rooms as well) take the freedom and flexibility we've come to expect from our personal smart devices – screen sharing, instant messaging, video calls -- and bring it into to the group environment, ideally from a single unified communications and collaboration interface. In these areas, colleagues can get together when all are available and ready to work on a challenge. Calling an area a "huddle space" – be it a room, semi-partitioned, or open – is more than just putting a verbal coat of paint on a familiar concept.

Think of the AV-enhanced huddle space as including some combination of these elements: a small table that seats up to six; microphones, an HD digital display at or very near the table for video conferencing, whiteboarding and presentation capabilities; connections for content sharing from personal devices to the display; and network connections for video conferencing. It's not much different from the familiar meeting room except in size, intention, and context. Which makes all the difference.
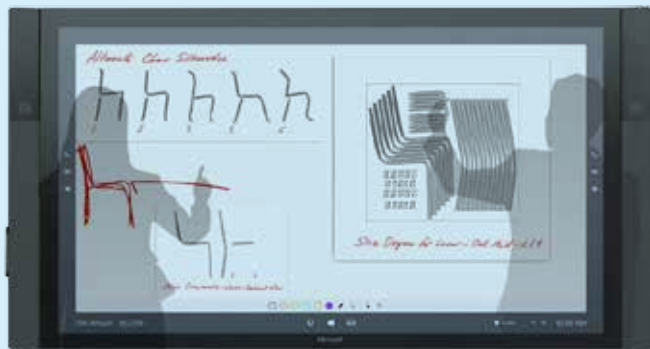
While we spend a lot of time working on our own islands of responsibility, those islands often need bridges. The huddle space does what the traditional conference room does, but in a space friendly to the small group that wants to get together for a few minutes. The nature of the huddle space enables meaningful, productive interaction by bringing together those in the office and those working remotely. Its importance is clear when you consider that more people are taking advantage of the ability to work remotely for a least part of the work week. Huddle-space-friendly applications like Skype for Business are driving video conferencing, which saw a 100 percent increase in usage by enterprises between 2013-2015, especially in companies with employees that work in teams across wide geographical areas (a median annual of ~0.9 million minutes to ~ 1.9 million minutes)[1]. Not only is a change in the workplace environment necessary to accommodate our preferences, we already have a high comfort level with the technology.

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(+01).866.559.8197   www.avispl.com

Even setting aside issues like mobility, huddle spaces address the need for gathering at the spur of the moment for an update or to tackle a problem. In some instances, these gatherings can be called "informal," but the truth is that any time colleagues collaborate for work purposes, it's important. And it may be informal only in the sense that no control system was required to reserve the space ahead of time. Depending on the size of the company and office configuration, you could have multiple huddle spaces accommodating teams for "right now" collaboration. Those areas can be defined physically as a separate room (or otherwise partitioned) or as a designated area where groups know they can convene at any time. With the right AV and collaboration tools within these areas, groups can work in real time, share and annotate the same documents, and see and hear one another from distant locations.

The huddle space doesn't require users to learn a new set of applications from room to room or area to area. Rather, they will be standardized across the enterprise – the audio (microphones, speakers), video, and user interfaces (from tabletop control systems to the digital board itself). A standards-based solution works seamlessly with the existing infrastructure and allows for ease of upgrades and the integration of new technologies, particularly with the support of a managed services partner.

Microsoft Surface Hub

The Microsoft Surface Hub combines Skype for Business with the benefits of voice, presence, data, video conferencing, and collaboration. Users can share content on their devices (laptop, tablet) with a large display for the group to see, effectively moving the work from the desk to the huddle room for group collaboration.

AMX, which specializes in control technology for meeting rooms and devices, can automate conference rooms through its Rapid Project Maker (RPM software). This cloud-based application simplifies the process of selecting, configuring, and connecting room devices such as the Surface Hub, switchers, touch panels, and displays. And it allows integrators to easily replicate that process across multiple spaces. RPM also gives IT departments network control of each room Surface Hub using AMX's Resource Management Suite software.

![AVI SPL logo]

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Get Tailored for a Custom Fit

Your interest in huddle spaces for improving the work environment will open up discussions and considerations that center on practical issues of suitability and design. For the sake of oversight and consistency of service, consider working with a single partner that has the certifications and experience to take on the consultation, design, integration, and support for your spaces. This end-to-end provider will have deep, broad knowledge of AV and collaboration industry standards and tools. This partner will also understand the related trends in business operations and work culture, and be able to address your company's unique needs in that context. Among these concerns, ask them speak to their experience with huddle spaces in other environments, and their relationships with the top manufacturers of the equipment that will be integrated.

Huddle spaces can be integrated into new and established offices as part of a renovation or a rethinking of how a current area or series of areas are being used. Whether you're converting vacant offices, building out unused areas, or designated new ones for collaboration equipment, a qualified integrator helps you navigate the choice of equipment, and addressing acoustics, lighting, background noise, and network access. Assessments of room surfaces and sound reflections will lead to audio systems that reduce background and ambient noise, and enhance sound across multiple rooms.

Regarding video collaboration, the environment and types of expected usage will help determine choice of split-screen display, dual displays, or projectors. You'll also want to know how the content-sharing capabilities will relate to the video conferencing.

Epson BrightLink® Pro

Your display options in the huddle space aren't limited to digital displays. Projectors like the BrightLink Pro turn any flat surface into an interactive work area – up to 100 inches diagonal -- without requiring a computer or software. Team members can collaborate in real time and contribute content from local or remote locations – including the ability to write on its projected whiteboard for functions like content annotation, which can be saved as notes in a digital format. It also works as a video conferencing display, and as a giant tablet that interacts with user laptops, which can be used for touch control of the display.

Your partner will also tell you what kind of video conferencing solution will make the most sense, such as one that accommodates "right now" meetings, with minimal set up required. AVI-SPL's Virtual Meeting Room services offer four deployment strategies: as-a-service cloud, hosted private cloud, private on premises, and a hybrid model that combines on-premise with cloud capabilities. See the VMR-at-a-glance sidebar, and read our paper "Four Virtual Meeting Room Deployment Strategies."
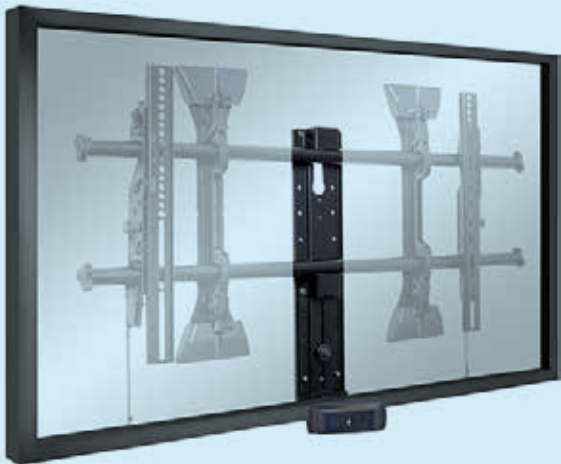
AVI-SPL VMR-at-a-Glance

- Conference room without walls
- Consolidates all standards-based real-time voice, video, and web conferencing tools into a single solution
- Available to users anytime, anywhere via any network or client type
- No reservation needed
- Intuitive to use

- Accessible from every dedicated hardware endpoint, software endpoint, web browser, mobile device, or telephony device
- Content sharing is consistent for all users, regardless of device
- Enterprise-grade security and quality
- Does not require (but can support) traditional room systems

Standardize the Areas

Customization and standardization aren't at odds in the context of huddle spaces. Rather, standardizing the right design for your company creates a path to success. To ensure your collaborative spaces are used, they have to be easy to use. Staff can't be – and shouldn't be -- expected to learn a new set of technologies from room to room. Since a big part of the value of the huddle space is in having many of them, whether in one location or across regional offices, your integrator should know how to take a standardized approach that controls costs for you, while ensuring that the staff can use the tools available to them, even as they travel from area to area or office to office. Standardization makes it easier to support the huddle spaces because you're working with a defined set of equipment. This is true whether you support the technology with your own team, or choose to go with a service provider.

Chief – Fusion ViewShare Kits

Chief's Fusion mounts and Da-Lite's ViewShare technology come together in a solution that is made expressly for the huddle space and traditional meeting rooms. The kits are compatible with Skype for Business, can mount the included HD camera above or below the digital display, or with center placement between displays, and a Microsoft-certified Jabra speaker phone includes digital signage processing.

Enbridge

Enbridge, an energy company listed as one of the Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporation, was long overdue for a technology upgrade at its Calgary headquarters. The ensuing overhaul, led by AVI-SPL's team of experts, included Enbridge's goal of accommodating the way its staff prefers to work and their need to collaborate with one another. Previously, staff had to master different sets of AV equipment from meeting room to meeting room. AVI-SPL made sure all of the general meeting rooms are identically equipped and programmed for quick collaboration. The rooms share a common, simplified way to connect devices. Enbridge employees know they can bring in any device – laptop, tablet – and connect them to the room system and get a meeting underway in less than a minute.

Support for the Long Term

With your standard set of rooms in place, supporting the technology in them is necessary, but it doesn't have to tax your IT department. That challenge can be entrusted to single qualified partner that has the variety of support services to ensure consistent services, reliability of equipment, and has the resources your IT team needs to maintain network security, systems oversight, and the long-term viability of the solutions so that they're always fulfilling your goals of improved collaboration. Beyond reliability and consistency, you're looking to future-proof through a partner that can support and implement software upgrades, and recommend relevant new solutions as they become available. AVI-SPL offers a Customer Care program that has different levels of service and includes break/fix support, one-call consolidation for all manufacturers in the environment, and regular technology reviews – all provided by certified technicians.

Conclusion

By familiarizing yourself with the benefits, uses, and technologies associated with huddle spaces as addressed in this paper, you have a good handle on the talking points you can expect (and should) cover with consultants, advisors, and integrators as you decide who is best to lead you through the course of improved workplace collaboration. Keep in mind that while the huddle spaces physically reside within the workplace, their benefits extend to those collaborating from other locations. Gather information from your stakeholders – affected departments, IT staff, key executives – so that you have a clear understanding of issues, concerns, and goals, and can bring them to the attention of a technology expert. Always keep this in mind: the goal isn't to acquire equipment and systems for their own sake. It's to work smarter.

Take a look at some of the AVI-SPL services that can be applied in support of this endeavor:

Customer Care: http://www.avispl.com/services/support/
Virtual Meeting Room: http://www.avispl.com/solutions/video-collaboration/virtual-meeting-rooms/
Professional Services: http://www.avispl.com/services/professional/

To find out more about huddle spaces, contact AVI-SPL at our toll-free number 866-559-8197, email us at sales@avispl.com, or visit www.avispl.com for a detailed analysis.

About AVI-SPL

AVI-SPL designs, builds, integrates, and supports systems for video collaboration, digital media, advanced visualization, integrated AV systems, and intelligent building control. We also provide a wide range of service solutions, including onsite staffing, call launching and gateway services for video conferences, and remote monitoring of AV and video systems. Our Customer Care program delivers manufacturer-certified maintenance and access to our 24/7/365 help desk. View our video case stories and hear from clients who've worked with us at **www.avispl.com/case-stories**.

Corporate Headquarters:
AVI-SPL
6301 Benjamin Road, Suite 101
Tampa, FL 33634

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AMX® is part of the HARMAN Professional Division, and the leading brand for the business, education, and government markets for the company. As such, AMX is dedicated to integrating AV solutions for an IT World. AMX solves the complexity of managing technology with reliable, consistent and scalable systems comprising control and automation, system-wide switching and AV signal distribution, digital signage and technology management. AMX systems are deployed worldwide in conference rooms, homes, classrooms, network operation/command centers, hotels, entertainment venues and broadcast facilities, among others.

Chief
Chief is a division of Milestone AV Technologies. With over 35 years of proven product and service excellence, hundreds of product awards and patented designs, Chief is globally recognized as an AV industry leader. Chief designs state-of-the-art mount and rack solutions that complement the technology they support. Chief is committed to delivering high-quality products that are easy to install and maintain.

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