



## InfoComm Day Two/Part 2 Dan Daley

**M** Dan Daley June 10th, 2010

The merger between AVI and SPL turned heads a couple of years ago. But AV integrators have been combining their efforts in other ways, and two of the more interesting business models both upped their presence at InfoComm 2010.

The **USAV Group** formed in 2001 and acts as a buying group for its 36 dealer/integrator members, who are offered rebates on product and services from 16 affiliated companies including **Chief**, **Sanyo**, **Draper**, and Liberty AV, whose booth USAV shared at the show. Seated at a table and looking out at the busy show floor from the booth's roof, USAV's CEO K.C. Schwarz listed the company's goals, chief among which are networking (they hold three group meetings a year) and the discounts, which come in the form of rebates of between 2 to 5 percent, a percentage of which comprise USAV's revenues. Disseminating best practices among integrators is another intention. But in a sector that's seen a steady increase in the number of players in recent years, the group also offers some sense of turf protection, what Schwarz called "reasonable exclusivity." Schwarz hired a marketing person, the first time in 9 years, intending to raise the group's profile. "We've been pretty quiet up till now," he said. "But the business is growing and this offers some integrators a bit of differentiation."

**CCS Presentation Systems** offers its affiliates, who operate AV integration companies in 26 cities in 13 states, similar purchasing leverage, as well as some competitive buffers in their regions. Each member company is independently owned but pays a license fee to use the CSS name, access to its network and to leverage its buying power. That power was readily apparent at the soirée CCS held at the Renaissance on Wednesday evening, where company founder John Godbout pointed out that the AV integration business had evolved from a cottage-type industry to one in which this kind of affiliation-based model increasingly serves the needs of integrators, manufacturers and their clients. "And it's going to keep heading in that direction," he said.

**AVI-SPL**, the nation's biggest AV integrator, had news of its own at Infocomm. The Florida-based company announced the launch of Digital Media as a Service (DMaaS), a new suite of services focused on digital media packaged as a subscription in a cloud-based service. Initial DMaaS services will focus on digital signage. "During the economic downturn, some of our customers have been asking us how we can help them deploy digital signage without having to invest significant capital for the centralized hardware," said Doug Carnell, VP of AVI-SPL's Business Video Group. "DMaaS will help our customers easily leverage the very latest in digital media technology without the huge up-front investment." AVI-SPL will also help clients develop their own content. Pricing will be flexible.