

"AUDIO-VISUALS AS A PRIME MOTIVATOR IN A MARKETING/TRAINING PICTURE IS AN OUT-AND-OUT PHENOMENON TODAY."

TRAINING AND A/V — A COMBINATION FOR PROFIT

BY BOB
CONROY

The only thing wrong with the English language is that it has too many words in it.

Words like "training" and hyphenated ones like "audio-visual."

Both conjure up highly restricted meanings in the minds of most people not in either field.

Take "training," for instance. Toss it at the general public and you'll get definitions along the lines of what ballplayers do in the spring, what a horse goes through to get ready for a race . . . or what happens to a Marine in boot camp.

Slip it into a word-association test with many a corporate executive and you might well find them associating "training" with "necessary evil."

Then, there's the case of "audio-visual."

Obviously, this is something identified with education. Audio-visual techniques and tools are found in schools. They're used to teach planned parenthood to the peasants. Maybe job training.

Regardless, both "training" and

"audio-visual" are perceived to be on the dreary side by far too many people who should know better.

It would never occur to such people to equate training and audio-visual with *selling* or both with *profit center*.

What training people and audio-visual programs have in common is the ability to demonstrate . . . illuminate . . . dramatize, overcome, captivate, motivate, show, reveal, promote, convince, recruit, explain, persuade and as many other positive words as you might want to find in your thesaurus.

And every last one plays a vital role in the selling process. If a company doesn't do any of these things, it would be difficult to imagine it making a profit.

Maybe we should drop all of these words from the English language in favor of just one: *Communicate*. That's a good, solid word without the slightest negative implication.

Director of communications! Now, there's a title with significance. It commands instant respect. Is there a training director anywhere who would dispute his

or her right to such a title?

The audio-visual industry today is rapidly succeeding in overcoming its own schoolish image with one better linked to communications and selling, but the transformation is only a handful of years in the making.

What happened, was one of the biggest jolts to American pride since the country first lost a track and field event in the Olympics. The Russians sent Sputnik into orbit in the late '50s. The best we were able to do was a Mickey Mantle home run.

The government reacted immediately. The call went out to catch up with space-age technology without delay and the coffers opened wide. To those in the business of making audio-visual equipment, it was Christmas every day. All kinds of funds were available to universities and vocational schools to buy projectors by the carload, and this they did.

Meantime, the manufacturers poured a lot of their profit money into research and development to come up with better and better systems. Motivation was not en-

tirely altruistic . . . if they didn't make improvements, competitors almost certainly would.

For instance, motion pictures clearly were an outstanding medium for teaching and training people, but the equipment was a nuisance. It wasn't enough for teachers to have degrees in math and physics, they had to be projectionists, too. There was all this infernal threading of film up, down, around and through things. Got it right? Fine. Turn the switch . . . and instant chaos. The little monster would immediately and avariciously start mangling great strips of film, while spewing out a mile or two of it on the floor, all before the frustrated operator could react and turn off the switch.

People were trying to solve this problem back in the early 1920s when the first patents were issued to put film in sealed, endless-loop cartridges. These weren't practical either because the film was too wide, not long enough, or the cartridges were so complicated that the film simply got chewed up inside.

A/V Made Easy

In 1961, the first practical, endless-loop cartridge patent was filed (by Technicolor), and granted in 1965. This was first for 8mm film and later for Super-8mm, which provided a 50 per cent larger image.

This would have been of small significance had not film technologists made superb advances in the clarity of film. Not so very long ago, anything commercial to be good had to be filmed on 35mm. A 16mm film was, at best, in the semi-pro league. As for 8mm . . . well, that was strictly for daddy to use while he screamed at his kids to "move — don't just stand there!"

Of course, most 8mm industrial and business audio-visual films are not taken with an 8mm camera. Whether the camera is 35mm, 16mm or video, the end result when converted to Super-8mm is an excellent image.

However, whether the A/V presentation was made for motion pictures, filmstrip or sound/slide projection, there had been the problem of portability. You could put a

handle on a grand piano and call it portable with as much justification as some of those early A/V systems. There were so many individual components that you needed the arms of an octopus to lug them around, and then a half-hour or more to set them all up. For all practical purposes, the audience had to come to the projector, not the other way around.

Meantime, sound went from wire to tape. Tape went from reel-to-reel to cassettes.

Videotape was born and almost immediately began a miniaturization process. First two-inch, then one-, three-quarter, now half-inch. Quarter-inch is next.

And, while all these good things were happening from Sputnik to Voyager, commercial television came into its own as the most effective advertising medium the world has ever known. Any doubts to that claim disappeared when color TV took over in the early '60s.

Psychologically, other things were taking place. Weaned on

Captain Kangaroo and settling down with Johnny Carson, people adopted the small picture tube and made it an indispensable part of living. The small screen is almost a security blanket. People are comfortable with it . . . in fact, would find it tough to live without it.

All the more reason why the small, built-in rear screens of today's A/V projectors have won ready acceptance. And they have flip mirrors for front throw to big screens, too. Everything is integrated in one unit and portability is a fact.

As the '70s evolved, the audio-visual equipment manufacturer found the vast educational market disappearing. The reasons:

- Prop. 13-type budgets cut off the funds that used to buy the latest in projection systems.
- With birth rates declining, school enrollments fell.
- Unused A/V hardware gathered dust.

Not long after the educational A/V market began to slip, business and industry found audio-

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visual and broke through the semantics barrier that prompted this article.

It was a discovery forced by desperation . . . sheer necessity. The cost of the average sales call soared close to the \$100-mark . . . and that's to make the call, not necessarily to close a deal. The rate of sales-force turnover became appalling, and down the drain went the time and money invested in teaching sales people how to sell a product or service.

And the products and services became infinitely more complex. Yesterday's typewriter became a word processor. Yesterday's Parchesi game is today's computerized marvel. Words like "software" were born, and "hardware" took on a meaning unrelated to nuts and bolts or the place to buy a screen door.

This would be fine were it not for the fact that the nation's schools were giving diplomas to graduates who couldn't read them. Illiteracy was spotted as an epidemic. I.Q. numbers were rising out of sight . . . only the "I" stood for "ignorance."

These were and are the people looking for selling jobs.

That's when — just a few years ago — corporate executives decided that words like "train" and "educate" and "teach" weren't really that far removed from "sell," after all.

A/V Can Sell!

If you are trying to *convince* someone to accept a job at your company, the word really isn't "recruiting" . . . you are *selling* . . . particularly if you are trying to persuade someone that they would be much better off moving to Toledo and escape the big earthquake coming to Southern California.

College football and basketball coaches travel the country from one end to the other, clawing each other to land the latest high school hot-shot for next year's varsity team. Better believe the best of them tote along a neat A/V projector and a film that makes old State U. the most glamorous campus on earth. There might even be a few seconds on academics! The coaches call this recruiting, but that's one

fine selling tool they brought with them.

Today's simplistic, briefcase-like A/V projectors make it easy. No way in the past would a recruiting coach attempt to lug a big projector and screen, plus reel-to-reel film, and try to put on a movie in a prospect's home. Today, he can land an All-American by simply pushing an "on" button.

This leads to the incredible growth in "personal selling" and franchised businesses in the past decade or so, and think a moment of the role that A/V techniques have played.

"Personal selling" used to be "door-to-door" selling, but the former is a much more attractive euphemism.

Just 20 years ago, when the thought of Sputnik was still galling, Amway Corporation was founded. First year's sales for this home care products leader were \$500,000. Twenty years later, the numbers exploded to \$500,000,000. Amway has one of the biggest and most sophisticated A/V departments in American business today. Its latest film rivals a big-budget Hollywood feature production . . . just look at it and see if you can resist signing up as an Amway distributor. This film *sells!*

Look at what's happening in real estate. Wasn't it just yesterday that real estate brokerages were individual enterprises? Now, franchised operations have taken a lock on the business.

Century 21 is the biggie . . . and its A/V program is simply awesome in its completeness and sophistication.

They have recruiting (selling) films to lure the newcomers who just passed their state exams and also to get the established veteran to join the Century 21 bandwagon. There's a training film to teach an agent how to get a new listing — the real name of the real estate game. Finally, there's the clincher — the listing film.

The agent carries this neat-looking projector and asks the homeowner to take a few minutes to see a movie. The owner agrees — some not believing that the little case could possibly contain a sound

movie projector.

They watch a movie that is a much stronger story about the "neighborhood professionals" so cutely done on television. Then the agent puts the projector in another room and hands the children an assortment of cartoon cartridges, effectively neutralizing them while the deal is being closed.

Proving Effectiveness With A/V

Meantime, a point-of-purchase explosion is taking place in the retail outlets of mass merchandisers such as J.C. Penney and Sears. The familiar TV-like screens are all over. People are pushing "on" buttons or else looking at continuous play programs and they are learning how to do their own wallpapering (with a specific brand, of course), how a game is played, how to apply a brand of cosmetics, or why this particular home-security system will keep their properties inviolate from nasty people with ski masks and guns. The public, in effect, is being trained to *want* a product. To make cash registers ring, wanting something is far more motivational than merely needing it.

Simply by constant exposure to A/V films in their departments, sales people are learning how to sell the item in spite of themselves. Call it brainwashing, perhaps.

With network television commercials going over six figures for a mere 30 seconds of exposure, smart advertisers have discovered "life after TV" . . . an A/V program (such as Century 21's) that plays back to the TV commercial and hits the prospects when they are right there, in the buying environment and ready to write checks or hand over their inevitable credit cards.

Then there are companies that manufacture earth-moving equipment or just about anything that can't be demonstrated on a prospect's desktop. How else do you prove effectively how your product or service works if not with an A/V presentation?

Printed collateral material is a dull substitute for sight, sound, color and action. And that's what A/V is all about.

Ben Franklin's bromide, "A pen-

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"The emergence of audio-visual as a prime motivator in a marketing/training picture is an out-and-out phenomenon today to the extent that it is giving many professional people new problems to go with the opportunities."

ny saved is a penny earned," is not one of his most exciting statements. How about "three-million dollars saved"? Now, you are in the big leagues. Talk numbers like that and you have won instant attention from any executive with carpeting under his or her chair.

That's exactly what happened to a major supermarket chain. Its profit and loss statement showed red ink in the \$3,000,000 range simply from losses incurred because youngsters in the back room didn't know how to open cartons of merchandise. These kids would take out their razor-sharp weapons and slash. They opened the cartons, all right, but in the process also destroyed the boxes of corn flakes or the plastic bottles of bleach inside. Occasionally, they also opened themselves, adding to

insurance claims.

A backroom A/V program corrected this situation fast. Now, training program? Or \$3,000,000 profit center . . .

The Retail Bankers of America concluded that its thousands of members had employee turnover problems just like everyone else. The RBA is promoting a slide/sound program designed to train mere clerks into becoming salespeople. Put a new employee in front of the screen, push the button, and get more profits out of that person in 30 minutes or less. Repeat as needed.

There is seemingly no end to case histories like these. The emergence of audio-visual as a prime motivator in a marketing/training picture is an out-and-out phenomenon today to the extent

that it is giving many professional people new problems to go with the opportunities. For instance: *Which is best* for your particular situation . . . Super-8mm? Video? Sound/slide? Filmstrip? *Silent* film?

Don't laugh at silent movies. The Soflens Division of Bausch & Lomb has been using small, silent projectors and cartridge Super-8mm silent film for years as the ideal technique for training new wearers in the use and care of contact lenses. Silent was preferred so that the eye-care practitioner would be able to provide personalized narration during the instruction period.

Sales, advertising and training people are going through a training program of their own. They are learning the best A/V formats for their requirements. They are learning little and not-so-little details such as shooting their scenes with a video camera and then converting the tape to Super-8mm along with still photos, charts and whatever else is wanted. Compared with a video monitor, a Super-8mm projector is more flexible, has fewer maintenance problems, takes up less space and certainly is more portable.

They are learning that A/V regardless of format puts on a presentation precisely as planned . . . everything in correct sequence . . . nothing forgotten . . . just push the button. It starts on time and it ends on time.

Top management is well on its way to discovering that "audio-visual" and "training" are simply synonyms for "profit."

Bob Conroy is currently director of advertising and public relations at the Audio-Visual Systems Division of Technicolor Inc. in Costa Mesa, CA. A veteran advertising person, Conroy lists affiliations with N.W. Ayer, Lennen & Newell, Cole Fischer Rogow and more recently, Needham, Harper & Steers/West.

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