

Telepresence allows for the marriage of tight security with a wide audience

21ST CENTURY SUMMIT

SECURE



Hosted by the United States Department of Labor on June 20, 2001, the Summit on the 21st Century Work Force combined staging, IMAG, and broadcast/Webcast technologies in a way that may define the future of security-sensitive events. By working with the producers and a variety of government agencies — and by using the latest videoconferencing gear — the show designers were able to reach a large audience while maintaining rigorous



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security at the on-site event, which took place at Washington DC's MCI Center sports and entertainment facility.

The Summit on the 21st Century Work Force, which explored labor and workforce training issues nation-wide, was moderated by ABC News analyst Cokie Roberts, and featured appearances from Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, Secretary of Education Rod Paige, Steve Ballmer of the Microsoft Corporation, Bill Marriott of Marriott Hotels

Corporation, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, executives from Harley Davidson and monster.com, and, most importantly, the President of the United States, George W. Bush. Local management firm Event Strategies, Inc. (ESI) coordinated the event, enlisting nearby Gaithersburg, MD-based CPR Multimedia Solutions to deliver and operate the sophisticated audiovisual systems.

Approximately 3,500 people attended the Summit, which



encompassed two separate stages on the main floor of the arena (one public stage and one in an area that was cordoned off and accessible by invitation only). A trade fair was set up in the hallways surrounding the main floor. CPR was responsible for all of the technical systems in the main room, including teleprompting, and a VIP room where speakers dined and met with members of the press. They were also charged with providing A/V services to the Department of Labor and private enterprise exhibits that were set up on MCI's concourse level.

The Summit was broadcast to Department of Labor sites across the country, as well as to the White House. The event was also broadcast live over the Internet. All of the cameras were isolation-recorded, as was the mixed program feed. CPR designed the A/V and lighting systems based on the requirements and suggestions given by ESI.

The main video displays were two 14' x 18' Barco DLite D7 LED display systems. Video control was achieved through a Videotek Prodigy component switcher, Videotek adjustable gain equalizers, a Sierra 16x16 component router, Sony video monitors, a Kalcomm SQG-7A color video quad splitter, and Scan-Do scan converters. The camera systems consisted of two Sony DXC-D30W cameras with Fujinon 16x9 lenses and one Sony DXC-D30W camera with a Canon 33x15 lens.

The loudspeaker system for this event featured EAW KF650's and SB850 subwoofers as mains, EAW KF300's as delays, and EAW JF100's as fills. The monitor system featured EAW 200IH speakers.

The main loudspeakers were powered by a combination of Crown MA5000, MA3600, and MA2400 amplifiers, while the delays and fills were driven by Crown MA2400's.

A Soundcraft Series Five 48-channel console sat at Front of House (FOH). Processing was achieved through a BSS Omnidrive FDS-388 system controller, and Klark Teknik delays and EQs. There was also a full Shure wireless package, which included in-ear monitors and wireless microphones. The wired microphone setup boasted a combination of Shure and Countryman products.

An ETC lighting system lit the event, with an ETC Express 48/96 console used for lighting control. Dimmer racks were by Leprecon.

"One of the characteristics about this job in general was the number of people that we had to coordinate with; partially because of the scale of this job, and partially because of the building and the client," explains Jeffrey Studley, president of CPR. "There were many more bases to touch; the MCI Center has its own set of rules because it's a union shop, the Department of Labor was very involved, the White House Communications Agency (WHCA) was very involved, and

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we had to go through all of the security and clearance processes that we don't have to go through for most jobs."

WHCA dictated a number of requirements to Event Strategies, which passed them down to CPR. "On top of all of the things that were going on and dealing with the logistics of getting an event up in a certain amount of time, the President of the United States showed up," says Jeff Monner, Senior Account Executive at CPR. "When the President of the United States speaks officially at an event, WHCA has a specific set of rules and regulations that dictate how things are done. Some of it concerns image: the President has to be lit with a particular color of white light; he has to be lit with a certain brightness of light and evenness so that there is never a bad camera angle. Also, any time the President speaks, he speaks at the Blue Goose, which is the presidential lectern and a security issue, as it is lined with Kevlar."

The audio that was fed through the presidential lectern

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was not fed directly to the CPR crew. "The microphones on that lectern were not ours," Monner says. "They were fed to WHCA's special sound system, which feeds a small battery-operated system under the stage. The feed then came to us and we distributed it to the entire arena. Once the President was gone, we changed out the lectern, installed our microphones, and had complete control over everything."

Fulfilling WHCA's requirements was only one portion of the challenges involved during a presidential event. Security — an issue that has become even more hyper-sensitive since the terrorist attacks in September — is of utmost concern.

"Any time there is an event involving the President, they have to perform a full security sweep," Monner says. "At a certain point, the entire venue is evacuated and the Secret Service locks down all of the entrances, installs their mag detectors, and then everyone — one at a time — is brought back in. During the time that the building is locked down, the Secret Service comes in with their uniformed officers and canines to do a search of the entire building. This has become more difficult recently because they are searching, obviously, a lot harder. The load-in times have become affected because it takes longer to do a security sweep."

Pointing to the satellite broadcasts and Webcasts, Studley believes that this event is an example of how similar events will be handled in the

future. "The MCI event is in some ways a model for what we're going to see more of in the industry," he predicts. "In the future, I think that the venues in which the events originate will become smaller. They will be places that are easier to sweep and easier to secure than a huge, cavernous place like the MCI Center. Perhaps they will be doing this out of an arena or an auditorium inside a government building where they know security is constant and they don't have to worry as much about transient traffic. It will originate from a site like that with a much smaller crowd that requires less crowd control and security. More and more of the people that are seeing the actual event will be seeing it at their desk in a government office building over a dedicated satellite channel line, or on a Webcast at home that night."

Rental and staging systems companies that want to target this lucrative business will have to have the capability to accommodate broadcast technology. "A lot of people are trying to figure out ways to make telepresence the key part of an event instead of physical presence," Studley observes. "That's something that the industry is going to have to adapt to in a lot of ways. Companies that are not broad-based in their approach to events in our industry are going to suffer mightily because of this. Companies that are aware of Webcasting and that have a handle on satellite link-ups and the Internet in general are the companies that are going to prosper."

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