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Features

Companies Band Together to Form Rental & Staging Network



Rental & Staging Network - RSN

Unique Association Marks Impressive Growth during Challenging Times

All the members of the Rental & Staging Network would agree that, as a whole, their organization is greater than the sum of its parts. As it barrels toward its fourth year propelled by a serious growth spurt, the organization continues to strive to be a network of top rental and staging companies joined by a common set of principles, high ethical standards and superior performance.

Written by Kevin M. Mitchell
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Matt Emerson, executive vice president, CEAVCO, Denver, CO

"We are a for-profit organization, and describe ourselves as an industry association," explains Matt Emerson, a founder of the group. "By definition, any association exists to provide benefits for its members that they cannot achieve on their own."

But Rental & Staging Network (RSN) is also a corporation, Evan Goldschlag adds. "We do have bylaws, and you have to be invited to join. When I was invited, I could see it was a group of like-minded individuals who all ran their companies in a similar manner. For me it was a great opportunity to build something that could be meaningful to the industry." Goldschlag, CEO of Videocam, Inc. (Anaheim, CA), points out that despite 2009 being a tough year for the live event industry, RSN continued to add new members.

Yet they are looking to grow to about twice that number. "Our goal is to have a representative member in every major market in the country," says Emerson, executive vice president of Denver-based CEAVCO. To be in the group, companies need to be full-service in video, audio, lighting and staging. They also need to be fairly large, with the personnel and resources to take on a big last-minute project.

Embracing a Good Idea



Evan Goldschlag, CEO of Videocam, Inc., Anaheim, CA

The group originated on the floors of live event trade shows. Though arguably competitors, these eventual RSN band of brothers would bump into each other in the aisles of LDI or InfoComm, or perhaps share a drink after a manufacturer's demo. In those fleeting moments, ideas would be exchanged and, in some cases, a common problem solved. So in December of 2007, five companies decided to create something that would make those exchanges more frequent, and RSN was hatched.

Emerson says he first pitched the idea to Bob Leon of Colortone Staging & Rentals (Cleveland, OH). The two had first met on an InfoComm committee, and Leon happened to be in Denver. Emerson was taking Leon to the airport and pitched the idea of a national network, and Leon said "Great! I'm on board." Leon also told him they needed to get Jeff Studley of CPR MultiMedia Solutions (Gaithersburg, MD) and he also joined.

"I wanted a network of people I could call on to bounce business ideas off and help me solve challenges," says Emerson.

Perhaps more importantly, he increasingly needed a national team of like-minded companies. "Say I was doing a big event for a client in Denver who also needed to do a satellite event in another city. I needed to be able to call in another company who I could trust to do the job as well as I would."

"Having a relationship between members, the mind share, and all the possible advantages that come with building relations with professionals in other markets was clearly a great idea," says Goldschlag.



Don Guzauckas, GM of HB Group, Inc. (North Haven, CT), is also a founding member of the group. "It was very easy for me to jump on the bandwagon because I'm always looking for two things: best business practices, and a trusted resource who can take my best interest to heart when I go to another town," he says. "What I get out of this group is every time we get together, I learn something I didn't know. It's powerful, and certainly the group is smarter than [an individual] is."

Collaboration and Trust

The RSN is exclusive in respect to regions — they aim for one member per major market, with a sphere of about 100 miles from their main office. "The idea is that with a distance of 100 miles, a company can get to an event quickly," Emerson says.

"The criteria is that the company is able to serve a major market, and they don't overlap with existing members," says Guzauckas. "They have to have ability to cover all aspects of staging, video, audio, and lighting. They have to be full-service, have excellent inventory and provide excellent service." If ownership of a member company changes more than 10 percent, that company has to re-apply. And they've had to politely turn down some requests by companies expressing interest in joining because they already have a representative in that market.

When there is an occasional conflict within the group, Guzauckas says they've met and professionally and respectfully worked it out to where it is resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

"One of the things we realized very early on is that we are all gypsies and all doing shows outside our territory," Emerson adds. "We recognize that we'll occasionally be competing for the same business, and that's just a fact of life. For example, some of my best clients are headquartered in Washington, D.C., which is technically CPR's territory."



Jeff Studley of CPR
MultiMedia Solutions,
Gaithersburg, MD

But ultimately, what keeps everybody on the up and up is the close bond they've built through their many meetings. "We have monthly conference calls and a minimum of two face to face meetings a year, so I don't want to sit down across from someone I've been unfair to. And as a businessman, I don't want anybody in the industry to say that if they go to Denver, don't call on Matt because he'll try to take your client. That's the last thing any of us want."

Guzauckas adds that each individual member needs to police themselves in respect to competing interests. In going after some business, he realized he might be treading on another member's turf. He made a call to Jeff Robinson of massAV (Billerica, MA) and, as it turns out, that fellow RSN-er did handle that client in general, "but then he said he could use some help because the client was asking for live video streaming, which we do, and we very easily brought that component in for him. But the collaboration was brought about by this trust factor we all share."

Nothing is too big or too small for the group to discuss. Members host the face-to-face meetings at least once a year, and there, the entire group gets an in-depth tour of that company's facility. Here, as in their monthly phone conferences, they can dive into the mundane aspects of the business like how to best pack plasmas to how cables are handled. Heck, they'll even share notes on bar coding. They also have a Yahoo email group where any principal can shoot out a question about a procedure or even a product.

And there have been instances of the group deciding on and buying a specific product together. "For the last couple of years, we have set up vendor programs and made purchases that has been quite successful, and we've gained some

influence with manufacturers, but we're not a buying group per se," Goldschlag says. What buying they do is simply a byproduct of the group.

The RSN will be having their first annual symposium that will include other employees of their respective organizations. They hope to attract sponsors. Otherwise, they look forward to growing and filling in spots on their network, but they will do it on their own terms.

"Trust is really core to the tenets of this association," Guzauckas says. "I have existing clients and relationships that are having events in remote cities and I need support." He cites as an example that Connecticut-based ESPN had an event in Los Angeles, where Goldschlag's company is based. "I handed them off to Evan and his team, and they made us look really, really good."

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