

Networking about networks

- Networked digital audio expands possibilities for fixed and temporary installations
- Interoperability is key

The AV Networking Congress revealed that the V (video) side of the AV networking paradigm is still unresolved.

Chairing the event was Bob Snyder, editor in chief of Channel Media Europe who commented: "We wanted to help bring more focus on networking audio and the demands it places on the network. The congress was able to bring in real world cases, and share installation experiences as well as show new products and update us on important vendors."

Protocols are the languages within a digital network that the AV equipment speaks allowing devices to connect and 'talk' to each other. In the audio universe, there are many of these: CobraNet, Ethersound, MADI, Dante, AVB, Ravenna, to name but a few. The main objective of protocols is to achieve interoperability between more than one manufacturer brand, creating a harmonious AV ecosystem.

In his presentation Mike Simms, director of sales and marketing at Atterotech, explained that in the search for interoperability both manufacturers, consultants and integrators need to understand the advantages and disadvantages of proprietary solutions versus open standards. The key to success is to choose a system that will work today and in years to come.

"While open standards are accessible to everybody, if many manufacturers use different open standards, these might not be easily interoperable," said Simms and added, "Proprietary is not a bad word. These solutions actually make the most sense for commercial AV because they are interoperable and they can work within a high channel count scenario."

Lee Ellison, Audinate CEO summed up Dante as "interoperability made simple".

"Dante is Audinate's patented solution which combines software, hardware and standard TCP/IP protocols, to transport many channels of high-resolution, uncompressed, low-latency digital media over relatively long distances and to multiple locations, using a standard 100 Mbps or 1 Gb Ethernet network," explained Ellison. "Dante provides a self-configuring, plug-and-play digital audio/video network over standard IP. It is licensed by over 70 OEM manufacturers, and Dante networked devices are currently being

designed into hundreds of AV OEM products."

Ellison added, "When you look at networking equipment, you don't want to disrupt the way the IT people work. Dante can work with IT manager's switcher of choice. Our aim is to educate installers and contractors on the importance of using networked audio. Digital allows going from having one-point-to-point connection, to a logical multiple connections with more flexibility, drawing on structure cabling."

There are several alliances and organisations that are working on setting up protocols to help AV/IT networking. Soon we will see AVB (Audio Video Bridging) Gen2 being talked about, although AVB itself has had a relatively slow start to implementation due to the small number of compatible network switches available.



The important thing is that AV consultants, installers and integrators need to be aware of and take into account protocols and interoperability when they specify AV networks in order to make their work as future proof as possible. ■