



## THE BUZZ: INSTALL OF THE MONTH

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WellChoice Collaboration Room Brookyn, N.Y.



The Sept. 11, 2001, attacks have spurred many companies to rely on communications technologies in order to spread their workforces across different locations. WellChoice, the parent company of health insurance provider Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, was directly affected by the attacks. On Sept. 11 Empire lost its offices in the World Trade Center. The company later relocated its offices to the 9 MetroTech Center building in downtown Brooklyn, which now holds the largest concentration of Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield employees.

Empire needed a flexible training room equipped with videoconference and web conference technology to allow for remote and local instruction of employees. McCann Systems, an AV design and systems integration firm based in Edison, N.J., was contracted to design this training room, called the Collaboration Room, as well as several conference rooms, starting in 2002. The Collaboration Room was the last piece of puzzle and was completed about a year ago. Jonathan Shor, director of technology at McCann, served as the senior project manager for the Collaboration Room. Martin Calverley was the AV design consultant on the project.

Empire employees have a host of internal applications they need to learn. They perform tasks like actuarial functions and account setup. Sometimes a teacher can be present in the Collaboration Room; other times the instructor will teach remotely via videoconference from another Empire location in the state. Also, the company relies on an internal application called Centra, which facilitates frequent web conferences for communication among employee teams.

This means audio and video goes into and out of the Collaboration Room, requiring cameras and display devices, as well as microphones and speaker systems.

For remote teaching, McCann specified a front-projection system to display a large image of the remote instructor. An NEC GT5000 LCD projector beams images to a 100in. Draper Clarion screen. At 6000 lumens and with dual lamps, the projector is bright enough to overcome the ambient light of the room. The screen is flanked by two NEC 42VP4 50in. plasma screens, with which, for example, remote instructors can use to display documents. An Extron Matrix 50 128 SVA audio/video switcher routes images and sound to their proper targets.

A full-fledged amplification system distributes audio throughout the room. It relies on Crest Audio CKV 100 and CKS 100 power amplifiers, two JBL Control 25 program speakers, and 10 JBL Control 24C Micro contractor series speakers (ceiling-mounted).

Of course, images and sound from the Collaboration Room need to be shared with other Empire facilities. The backbone of the system is the Polycom VS4000 videoconferencing codec. Three Sony EVI-D100 cameras are positioned around the room, and a Beyer Dynamics SHM 22 H microphone captures audio from the ceiling. In addition, each student station has a Sennheiser MAB 40 microphone headset and a Logitech webcam. Students are watched from afar not only over videoconference — a glass wall at the back of the room allows viewing from the hallway, but liquid crystal inside the glass can turn it opaque.

To manage the audio and video, instructors use a Crestron TPS-4500 Isys control panel for routing and configuration of video and audio sources. The room can also be controlled remotely via Crestron e-Control.

“The rooms are run even if there’s no one onsite to run them,” says Shor.

From the start, the architect of the room was conscious of its future marriage to a comprehensive audiovisual system, as was Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield. “Empire is very aware of technology — and mating the architectural aspects of the room with the technology and making sure they complement each other,” Shor says. He mentions the raised floor throughout the facility that allows easier cabling, as well as the wall panels that absorb sound.

Still, one challenge of the architecture was how to facilitate 21 student stations — each with a monitor and a mounted webcam —



**McCann Systems designed WellChoice’s Collaboration Room in the 9 MetroTech Center to include audiovisual for remote teaching and web conferencing.**

and maintain excellent sight lines to the two-person instructor workstation. Custom tabletops were a partial solution. Monitors were set in wells to minimize their obstruction. They're also tilted upward to reduce glare. McCann determined that three tiers of seating were needed to accommodate the sight lines.

To maximize space, the room features blade PCs, which are small devices that contain connectivity for KVM (keyboard, monitor, and mouse), video, USB, audio, and microphone. These are connected (over Cat-5) to CPUs housed in a central location, keeping their associated heat and noise out of the Collaboration Room.

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