

# 5 MINUTE INTERVIEW



## CRAIG JANSSEN

Principal of Acoustic Dimensions (AD) — a company specializing in the design of acoustics and performance systems with offices in Texas, New York, and the United Kingdom — and Strategic Dimensions, a strategic facility planning group based in Addison, Texas. Since forming AD's Dallas office in 1991, Janssen has worked with more than 1,000 clients. He provides leadership for a group of talented people in the Dallas office.

**PRO AV:** What is happening in the house of worship market right now? Any major events or trends that have changed the market in the last year?

**JANSSEN:** The dominant change in the last two years is the explosion of video venues. Three years ago, there were probably less than 100 video venues (a separate venue that translates the video from the main campus). At this point, it is estimated that there are more than 3,000 video venues. It's been an absolute explosion of growth; it has changed the game dramatically. There are a number of positions as to why they are popular — some philosophical and some practical. Philosophical, in part, is that some of the large churches have extended their brand. They have taken what they did extremely well at one campus — programs, education, management, and a good organizational structure — and made it available to people who can't get to the campus. Video venues solve issues with traffic and space within the church. They are relatively low cost, yet effective, for contemporary worship.

There are also economic and political factors contributing to the use of these venues. Churches can't build these bigger and bigger structures with the money available. With a caveat of a handful of 10,000-plus seat churches, you realistically are not going to build larger structures. There isn't enough money to build them, despite what people think. Politically, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find neighborhoods that will allow you to build in them. That is a major heartache and problem.

You literally have neighborhood communities that are putting up massive legal roadblocks in the way of churches trying to construct. Once you put all the issues together, video venues look very attractive.

**PRO AV:** Has the pace of AV technology adoption changed at all?

**JANSSEN:** The pace of technology adoption continues to be a trend, depending on the style of church. The evangelical or charismatic churches tend to be the most progressive; traditional churches less so. That being said, there is a massive generational shift of "digital immigrants" versus "digital natives" who are wired very differently. Digital natives are dramatically more capable. With respect to AV technology, it's not that they are necessarily better at sound; rather they are more comfortable with integrating multiple forms of technology. Tech directors are, in general, more confident at what they know — sometimes with cause, sometimes without. It can be a blessing and a curse depending on the setting.

**PRO AV:** Is there a popular technology in this market right now?

**JANSSEN:** In prior years, the conversations were all about digital mixing consoles. Digital consoles are common now. If you're not in digital consoles, they question has to be "what the heck are you doing?"

If there is going to be an emerging technology over the next couple of years, it will be digital media servers that blend the needs of the video projection with lighting. This has been happening for the past two years in higher-end theaters and for the last year in major churches. As prices drop and the understanding of how to use the technology in creative and innovative ways [increases], the medium of thought and communication will change.

There is a transition in the methodology of communication in the church market that drives all of this. The tech field tends to want tools to drive communication but, in reality, communication should drive tools. What's happening is that churches are moving from a presentation-centric methodology to spaces that provide an experience and an emotion. Digital media servers allow you to respond to the moment, on the fly.

**PRO AV:** What market pressures exist for houses of worship?

**JANSSEN:** We often read about the high-dollar church construction projects that make it, but for every one, there are probably 49 other projects that failed. There are several key pressures that factor into failures. The first and foremost is that the construction cost escalation has outstripped [inflation] by a factor of 3 to 1 over the past decade. When you correlate that with a church's expectation for increasing space, there is a conflict. For example, church children's programs now encompass the classroom plus a theater experience and a playground. That is a quadrupling of the space requirements. The days of just sitting in the classroom are gone.

Community space is also a high value. So, too, is the higher expectation for experience — for connecting to people and, in a spiritual sense, to God. Add all those things together and you are dramatically increasing architecture and the associated costs. The problem is that churches have a fixed income stream. What happens are massive cost overrides on a church project and many times it fails. **AV**

