

Top 5 House of Worship Market Integrators

These market-leading firms not only have solutions but also market strategies that appeal to unique church clients.

Aug. 01, 2012 — by [Mark Mayfield](#)

House of worship (HOW) is one of the perennially strongest vertical markets. Although numbers vary depending on whom you ask, there are estimated to be about 350,000 to 400,000 HOW buildings in the U.S. Not all of them are likely to use technology to enhance their services; but most sources agree that at least half of them are using video projection and audio systems.

Meanwhile, of all the vertical markets in which CIs operate, HOW seems to have the most unique characteristics, and successful integrators realize the value of a deep commitment to and understanding of these attributes.

According to Blake Jochum, executive producer, business development at **All Pro Sound** in Pensacola, Fla., it's especially critical to be aware of trends and changing attitudes in the HOW market. "Churches are getting more progressive, with less emphasis on 'preaching' and more on entertaining - which, in turn, leads to spending more on A/V," says Jochum. "It's important to learn to 'speak the language' in the church market."

In the HOW market, most of the leading suppliers provide complete audio, video and lighting (AVL) packages. All Pro Sound is also a large online seller of equipment to all types of vertical markets, but HOW is its specialty. Jochum uses the term "enhanced services" to describe the general technology trend in modern houses of worship.

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"Today's contemporary worship requirements are leading many traditional churches to renovate sanctuaries or build new facilities that can accommodate more advanced audio, video, and lighting systems," he says. Despite their large presence in on-line catalog sales, he describes All Pro Sound as a "design-build" contractor, which he feels have better margins than bid-only projects.

Based in Olympia, Wash., **CCI Solutions** has also built a significant business in online sales to the HOW



market, but it also realizes that consulting, design, installation and service play key roles in success. Ron Simonson, CEO/president of the 37 year-old firm says: “We have a vibrant and flourishing business providing AVL products to our customers through ecommerce, phone and catalog sales. But we also have a world-class systems integration group which designs and installs some very impressive house of worship and other systems integration projects.”

THE TOP FIVE								PERCENTAGE OF REVENUE** DERIVED FROM									
	No. of Locations	No. of Employees	Years in Business	Total Revenue (2011)	Total Revenue from Commercial Projects (2011)	No. of 2011 Installations	Percentage of Projects Featuring 3+ Product Categories*	Offices	K-12	Higher Ed	Healthcare	Hotels	Restaurants/Bars	HOW	Government	Retail	Entertainment
All Pro Sound designbuildperform.com HQ: PENSACOLA, FL	1	89	32	\$28M	\$14M	100	50%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	45%	0%	0%	50%
CCI Solutions ccisolutions.com HQ: OLYMPIA, WA	1*	50*	35*	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Church Audio-Video churchaudiovideo.com HQ: GRAND PRAIRIE, TX	4	23	41	\$12M	\$12M	15	40%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	90%	0%	0%	0%
Clark Powell clark-powell.com HQ: WINSTON-SALEM, NC	7*	61	29	DNP	DNP	300	DNP	35%	10%	20%	10%	0%	0%	15%	10%	0%	0%
Visual Worshiper visualworshiper.com HQ: DALLAS, TX	1	1	5	DNP	DNP	200	DNP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%

Click image for enlarged version of chart. *View [application](#) for complete list of product categories.

While customer service is important in any market, Simonson contends this is especially true in HOW. “Each church we partner with is given the individual attention, quality and support they need to be successful in ministry. Our people and our quality are the two attributes that consistently bring referral customers to CCI Solutions,” he says.

Although this market is extremely competitive, CCI Solutions doesn’t believe you can necessarily be successful by just offering the lowest price. “Make sure you factor the cost of providing high quality on a consistent basis and price your work accordingly,” he says. “You can’t promise to provide a long-term relationship, high quality and superior service if your business plan can’t sustain it.”

Unlike any other Vertical

Like All Pro Sound’s Jochum, Jeff McLeod, managing director at **Church Audio-Video** in Grand Prairie, Texas, agrees that success in the HOW markets requires that you “speak the language” of your customer. As the firm’s name suggests, Church Audio-Video is certainly fluent; HOW has been its sole focus for over 41 years.

“We really understand churches and, as devoted followers of Christ, we have an instant rapport with our customers throughout our team,” says McLeod. Like most successful firms in any industry, he says a key contributor to their success is their people. “We believe it’s critical to hire the best and brightest people you can, and focus on their success,” he says. And, Christian principles guide their business practices. “Always do the right thing, and live by a code of conduct reflective of the Golden Rule,” advises McLeod.

Camron Ware, owner and lead designer for **Visual Worshiper**, a one-man consulting and live event design group, says his company is “the originator and leader in environmental projection.” He started using this approach to worship in 2005 when he was a board member at Irving Bible Church and has turned that into a lucrative business that last year saw more than 200 installations.

“It’s not a fad,” Ware says regarding environmental projection, a method by which churchgoers are surrounded by visual stimulation at their services. “It’s exploding right now.”

Things Leaders Have in Common

- Mega church technology may be a new phenomenon, but these integrators aren’t

While environmental projection is most popular at Baptist churches, many of which feature blank white walls that serve as ideal canvases on which Ware can design an eye-popping show, there are no real limits.

- newcomers; they have been in business an average of 28 years
- Those who provided information range in revenue from \$12M to \$28M
- They offer wider than average ranges of technical skills

“We made it obtainable and scalable,” Ware says. “After people saw what we were doing at my church, other churches started to come to us and ask how they could do it too. I started the company to respond to the need.” Environmental projection is increasing in popularity across the country, he says, and it’s even begun popping up overseas.

Visual Worshiper stands out from the ever-growing crowd of companies involved in visual worship because of its willingness to train church leaders why and how environmental projection and lighting can help their services, Ware says. On his website, Ware says, “We are visual creatures, and God made us that way! I believe that we have a responsibility to use visual in a God-honoring way and to help people use their gifts to glorify God.

Lessons from Leaders

- There needs to be a strong focus on and commitment to HOW market (one firm is exclusively focused on HOW)
- Some emphasis “understanding the customer,” and that can mean being able to relate to them on a spiritual level
- Two of them have profitable online retail sales operations

“We’re not trying to show off,” he says. “We’re trying to envelop people in visual worship.”

Having expertise in other vertical markets can also help you succeed in the HOW market, says Stephanie Bluhm, president of Winston-Salem, N.C.-based **Clark Powell**. Since broadcast is such a large part of many ministries, it helps to have expertise in broadcast and recording technologies, she contends. “Our company roots were in designing and installing broadcast systems, and church installations are, for the most part, broadcast studios on

some level. We have a great depth and breadth of knowledge in this area,” she says.

But beyond just providing expertise in other than the usual A/V technologies, it’s also important to remember how important the physical building is to the church community. It’s a well-known fact that houses of worship present many unique system design and installation challenges, especially with regard to ambient lighting and acoustics. Many older churches were never designed for electronic audio or video systems, and altering any part of the interior décor is often met with significant resistance from church members. Bluhm suggests, “Be prepared to deal with the uniqueness of each facility in regards to structural, acoustical and aesthetic challenges.”

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