

Children's museum finds harmony with IP speakers.

Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum improves visitor experience and cuts costs with easy-to-use Axis network audio system.



Organization:

Peoria PlayHouse
Children's Museum

Location:

Peoria, Illinois, USA

Industry segment:

Tourism

Application:

Public address and
background music

Axis partner:

Kern Group Security
Solutions

In the late 1990s, several women from the Junior League of Peoria, Illinois, decided that the city needed a children's museum. A partnership with the Peoria Park District and the Peoria Zoological Society proved fruitful, as the museum was able to take up residence in the Park District's administrative offices, a historic two-story house in Glencoe Park that was built in the 1890s and is located next to the Peoria Zoo and Botanical Gardens, another Park District program.

After a lengthy fundraising campaign, the Junior League and the Parks District generated the \$5 million necessary to renovate the former offices and hire experienced designers to create custom exhibits reflecting the culture of central Illinois. While the building was completely transformed to accommodate the museum, it lacked a public address system to broadcast announcements and alerts throughout the museum.

As a result, visitors had to tell their children when the museum was closing, which resulted in many temper tantrums from children who simply weren't ready to leave yet. In fact, this had become a major problem, says Rebecca Shulman Herz, the Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum's Director.

"Parents had been asking us for years to make some sort of announcement that we're closing. They don't want to be the bad guys, and we knew we should support them and help their kids know it's not the parents' fault they have to leave," she says.

On top of that, the museum knew speakers would be useful for making announcements if a car was parked illegally or if there was an emergency situation, such as a tornado.

"Given the safety concerns, we knew we needed a way to address all of our visitors, so we started working with the Park District's IT staff to figure out how we could make that happen," Herz says.



A sound decision to improve communication and safety with IP speaker system

The museum worked with The Kern Group, an Axis partner also located in Peoria, to identify the right solution for its needs. After researching the options, Kern provided an AXIS C1004-E Network Cabinet Speaker for the museum to try out in the building, which gave the team the opportunity to see the product in action.

"We were familiar with the Axis brand, and the features-to-price ratio made it attractive to us. And no other vendor offered the demo opportunity we were given," says Willie Howe, Information Security Supervisor for the Peoria Park District.

One of the key features that led the museum to choose the cabinet speakers was the ability for staff to page specific zones or the entire location using the museum's existing phone system with a SIP tie-in.

"We knew we needed something we could control from our offices," Herz says. In all, the museum purchased six more AXIS C1004-E speakers for installation throughout the building.

'A breeze' to install

When it came time to install the speakers, Howe and his team collaborated with museum staff to determine the most appropriate locations, namely those where staff wanted messages to be loudest and clearest in a busy, noisy museum.

"We walked around and thought about where sound would cut off and where the loudest areas were, and then took the IT department's advice on where they would be most strategically placed," Herz says.

The physical installation went quickly thanks to the speakers' two-part mounting system and single-cable connection, which Howe says "made it a breeze" to install the brackets that hold the speakers. This was especially helpful because of the small size of Howe's team.

"After the bracket is installed, it's two screws for the speakers and you're done. One person can easily mount several of these in a day," Howe says.

AXIS C1004-E speakers are preconfigured to provide high-quality audio in a single unit with no need for additional hardware, including an amplifier, mixer or power supply. The speakers easily connected to the PlayHouse's existing IP network with a single PoE cable that provided both connectivity and power.

Management with a simple click

While the speakers' installation was extremely easy, setup and management may have been even easier thanks to AXIS Audio Player software, which comes pre-installed on all Axis network speakers and offers all the functionality needed to make live or recorded announcements or schedule music playlists.

"The software is super user-friendly. I can go ahead and schedule anything I want with just a click," Herz says.

AXIS Audio Player also simplified the initial configuration of the speakers as well, including the ability to identify the "leader" speaker, which dictates the performance and programming of the others.

"The software side of the speakers is very easy. They 'see' each other on the network, and we can determine the leader with a single click," Howe says.

Improved coverage and lower costs

Beyond allowing museum staff to make closing and emergency announcements, the speakers have also been used to provide music for events, including a major fundraiser.

"For a recent fundraiser, instead of hiring musicians we were able to play our chosen playlist through the speakers, which saved us money," Herz says.

In addition to cost savings, the speakers make it possible to play music in all areas of the museum, which wasn't possible with a live band. "We're on two floors, so that was really hard to do before we had the speakers," Herz says.





'Flawless' performance

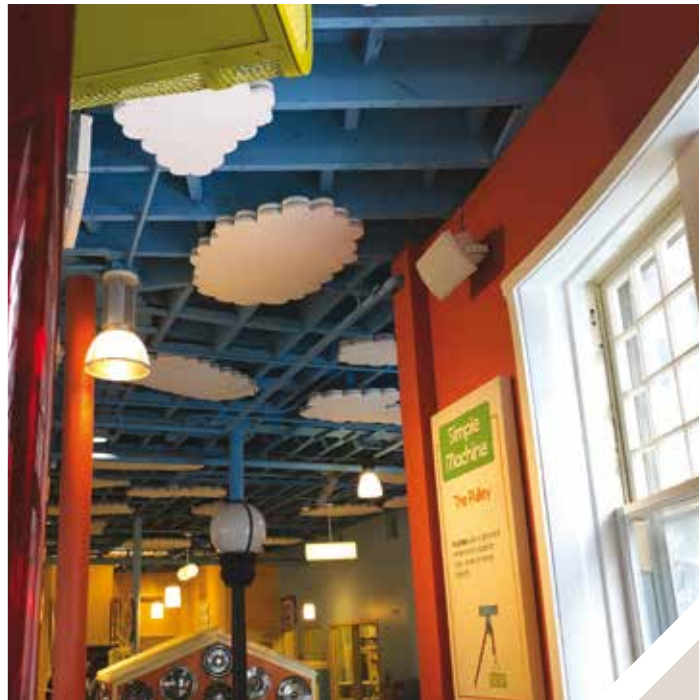
While the speakers have paid early dividends, museum staff is already thinking of new ways to employ them to improve visitors' experience, including playing a "goodbye" song to accompany closing announcements.

"The speakers have performed flawlessly since installation. The staff is finding more use for them and wants the ability to stream music with websites or apps, and the AXIS C8033 Network Audio Bridge allows us to stream input from any source to the speakers," Howe says.

Axis speakers are starting to spread across the Park District, with 12 speakers at its Lakeview Recreation Center and another six being installed at its Heart of Illinois Special Recreation Association facility. Both locations will also employ Axis audio bridges to allow the flexibility to stream audio from any source.

"The interface has been extremely easy. We deal with so many different computer systems here for different things, and I would say AXIS Audio Player gets an A for user-friendliness."

**Rebecca Shulman Herz,
Director, Peoria PlayHouse
Children's Museum**



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