

TALK OF THE TOWN

Word Of Mouth Keeps Monolith Systems Busy With A Variety Of Projects

by Mary Bakija

Early in his career at a couple of AV integration companies, Robert Fleischacker found that while the work was interesting, figuring out how to best help the client was even more fulfilling. "I was always more interested in servicing the client, getting the client what they needed," he said. Wanting to provide a more client-centric service, Fleischacker struck out on his own in 1997 and created Monolith Modular Systems, now known simply as Monolith Systems, a New York City firm that has been putting clients first for 13 years.

"The client's input is vital to what we do," Fleischacker said. "They are the ones who have to run the system. We can design one that anyone can use, but if I don't know what you're doing with it, it doesn't make sense to do it that way." This is also, he explained, how Monolith differs from consultants. "We don't work with any consulting firms—we are strictly design-build—because I want that interaction with the end user,



A long-time client of Monolith Systems, New York University has many classrooms and lecture halls with interactive AV systems installed.

Programmable RS-232 I/O Controller

(Contact or Voltage)

10 user-programmable Command Strings

32 user-programmable IR Memory

User configuration for up to 4 Inputs, 4 Outputs or any combination

Compact, Reliable, and Economical



HR-4P | HR HALL RESEARCH

714.641.6607

www.hallresearch.com

Tustin CA USA

not with the consultant, who 'thinks' they know what the end user wants. If it's not doing what they want, then they spent money on a consultant who told them what they want to do, then spend more money on top of that to get a contractor to come in and build what the consultant thinks they want to do, when it was never the right thing in the first place."

Monolith started out working largely on production-oriented projects, since Fleischacker had previously spent a few years as a recording engineer. About three months into the new company, he received a call from a colleague who wondered if Fleischacker could help a friend of his out with some problems he was having with a video wall. "I said okay and asked where I was going, and he said, 'Well, you need to put a tie on,'" he recalled. "When he said the NASDAQ Stock Market, you could hear my jaw hit the floor." After Monolith landed the first broadcast studio at NASDAQ's Whitehall Street location, the company was in full swing.

The production side continued

QUICK BIO



COMPANY: Monolith Systems

FOUNDED: 1997

RUSH HOUR: Traffic and parking in New York City can be next to impossible, which is one reason Monolith sometimes carts equipment from its office to a job site on the subway.

strong for several years, including work at Standard & Poor's broadcast studio and the now-defunct American Stock Exchange, but these days NASDAQ is the some of the only work Monolith still does on that end. It's since moved into more and more AV work, where new projects have been generated from positive recommendations between clients. At the advertising giant Grey Group, Fleischacker fixed outdated systems

rather than completely replacing them, winning over the company. "I wasn't going to make him spend money that he didn't really have to spend," he said. Such an ideal got him recommended from there to another advertising group, McCann Erickson, where servicing existing, and new, systems has continued to be a large part of the business.

"We started servicing the systems that they had there, and what we discovered is that they were spending a lot of money on service contracts, and their service contracts were mostly preventative maintenance," he explained. "I sat with them and said, 'You don't need this, what you need to do is have your own people check the systems, report back to us with problems that they're experiencing, and cut your budgets down tremendously.' It seems obvious, but other competitors of mine don't work that way." As a result, Monolith does not do service contracts—if a client requires the

service, someone will come in and charge an hourly rate, but they don't pay that upfront, so they only pay for what they actually receive. Fleischacker finds that the money clients save on service contracts is often put into building new rooms. "So we still get the money," he said, "but we did the right thing, because we built them rooms, and now they can provide

more service to their clients."

The higher education market keeps Monolith busy as well, with clients like NYU, Columbia, and York College constantly sending requests for proposals. Fleischacker sees this success as a reflection of his stellar crew, which includes people who have been working with him for a decade or more. "When you get somebody good, they

don't generally leave if you take care of them," he said. "They're always taken care of in the field—we're welcomed into a place. Generally if something does go wrong, the client is not waiting forever to get us to fix it. Our clients appreciate that and treat our guys with the respect that they deserve, because they're down there to try to help them out with a problem." ■

Speaking In Code

Determining who owns the code is a sticky issue, but Robert Fleischacker, president and founder of Monolith Systems, believes strongly that the client should ultimately retain access to the programming lines of a job. At NYU, for instance, Fleischacker feels responsible for changing their purchase orders so the university owns the code upon completion of the work.

"I told them they must own the code if they're purchasing it," he explained. "It allows us to go in and do updates for them without having to charge them ridiculous amounts—it doesn't handcuff the client." Under the same position that keeps Monolith from requiring service contracts, Fleischacker believes that the client should feel free in the future to hire whomever is best for the job, and for the client, keeping a copy of the code is essential for that. He also believes, and has experienced in practice, that providing that option helps build trust, and brings the work back to Monolith anyway.

"My philosophy is that if you're an advertising agency and you're hired to create that spot, you don't own the spot at the end of the spot—the company that hired you does," he said. "It's the same as the code. It goes back to the service calls—if you keep the code, they *have* to call you back. I don't want that. I want them to *want* to call us back. And that has worked out very well."

Nothing gets in the way
of your great ideas.
Including You.



Camera shot of a whiteboard

Which would you choose?
The reflection and obstruction-free
Video Whiteboard from Vaddio.

Vaddio's new Video Whiteboard eliminates the need to aim a fixed or PTZ camera at your presentation. And with no camera, your body won't block the shot. Light can't reflect onto the lens. And screen images are always readable and distortion-free.

The Video Whiteboard offers presenters a clear, creative outlet for capturing traditional classroom content.

Video Whiteboard outputs include HD and SD video signals ideal for use in videoconferencing, content creation, IMAG or rich media systems. Vaddio's EZCamera Cabling System with HSDS™ routes power and USB data over a single Cat. 5 cable to the Quick-Connect interface,

outputting DVI/HDMI or analog component HD video in 720p resolution or analog composite SD video – both NTSC and PAL. Because the Video Whiteboard does not require a dedicated PC, it is compatible with any videoconferencing, TelePresence, distance education or video media distribution system. In addition to HD/SD video outputs, data can be captured and stored as JPEGs on any USB flash drive. And the closed operating system eliminates hardware requirements, compatibility hassles and software issues.

