

SIMO's Conference Room 3.0

More than just furniture, IMT integrates the best in meeting and boardroom furniture and the technology that allows users to turn a bland gathering into an interactive event.

BY: ROB KIRKBRIDE







For years, furniture and technology has moved closer together, but some office furniture makers are too scared to make the connection. Calgary-based SIMO Corp. is changing that with its new Interactive Meeting Technologies (IMT) product.

More than just furniture, IMT integrates the best in meeting and boardroom furniture and the technology that allows users to turn a bland gathering into an interactive event. It is an all-in-one, plug-and-play product. Buyers of the IMT system will get all the furniture and technology needed.

It is an innovative product, especially from a small Canadian manufacturer best known for its wood furniture and seating products. But SIMO Chief Executive Officer Gary Scitthelm, who helped build SMED and later Haworth's Canadian business into powers, believes it is the perfect marriage of furniture and technology.

"It is probably the most exciting thing I've ever been involved in," he said. "Meeting rooms have always frustrated the bejesus out of me. With the IMT product, so many elements are coming together. When you put something like this together piece by piece, you always find they are hard to build and they are enormously difficult to use. You have to call an IT person to set it up, you have three to four different remote controls and you need a degree in electronics to get it all to work. IMT is easy to set up and use."

Effective meeting rooms are certainly difficult to design, integrate and construct. The wiring is usually dedicated to the equipment. The equipment is inconsistent and doesn't always work together. And switching is often difficult. Add furniture

to the mix and it gets even more complicated. Most of the furniture and equipment is fixed in place and there is no way to electronically capture notes. Most conference rooms, even those that are wired properly for technology, have an institutional appearance. They are just plain ugly.

Still, technology is needed, especially in meeting rooms. That's where IMT comes in. IMT solves the common problems associated with building and using meeting room technology by addressing four key issues: integration, design, single company sourcing and user comfort.

IMT integrates all the needed technology to make a meeting hum -- all in an attractive package. It offers laptop docking, touch screen technology, electronic white boarding and content capture, multimedia, a commercial grade flat panel monitor, integrated equipment and controls, LCD touch-screen controls and video conferencing. All of it comes in one package, from one source.

Key to the entire IMT system is its "Touchpoint technology." SIMO partnered with fellow Calgary firm, Smart Technologies on the system. IMT's proprietary Touchpoint technology with Smart's DVIT system facilitates electronic white boarding, content capture and touch screen functionality. While IMT comes with a flat panel monitor, the system is set up to allow upgrades as technology changes.

IMT is an all-in-one system. That means users can literally plug it in the wall and connect it to the Internet and it is ready to use. SIMO conducted a soft launch in Western Canada "so it is absolutely solid," Scitthelm said. "It is so easy to use," he said. "Up in Edmonton, we sent it to a site where two sales-

people received it at the back dock, installed it and had it up in running in less than two hours.”

Scitthelm said IMT is the first and only complete integrated meeting room solution sold from a single source. Steelcase and its PolyVision subsidiary have come close, but most of the high-tech PolyVision interactive whiteboards are sold independent of the furniture. media:scape, Steelcase’s furniture-technology device that allows users with laptops to connect, also comes close, but doesn’t have all the features found in IMT.

SIMO has a complete line of products for the collaborative environment. The company makes boardroom and meeting room tables, credenzas, lecterns, collaborative seating and “Java Centers” -- mini coffee houses that work in a corporate setting. The company also does “specials” as well.

Still, it is IMT that is the biggest product to come out of SIMO since Scitthelm partnered with Louis Kelemen Jr. at the company. In addition to building furniture for its own catalog, the company also does manufacturing for many OEMs, mostly producing casegoods. SIMO works with Steelcase, Herman Miller and DIRT.

The company doesn’t have aspirations to get into task seating or cubicles. Its sweet spot is making products that make meeting and collaboration easier, which is important since many in the young generations entering the office want to work that way.

SIMO is launching IMT early in the year, well before

NeoCon, “because of our anxiousness to get the product out,” Scitthelm said, though he added that the company will likely show it in Chicago as well, either in a SIMO booth or a partner company’s showroom.

IMT would not be possible without SIMO’s Smart Technology partners, Scitthelm said. “They are a phenomenal partner,” he said. “They do electronic whiteboarding worldwide and we wanted to introduce technology into the corporate meeting room. I think the product exceeded both our expectations. When it was finished, we both said, ‘Wow, I think we have something really neat here.’”

Though it integrates technology, Scitthelm said IMT is very dealer-friendly. The product is backed by one source -- SIMO -- which makes it easy to sell. Installed, complete with the commercial monitor and technology, IMT starts at about \$10,000. Loaded with all the video conferencing and furniture options, it tops out at about \$25,000. Scitthelm said that is a 40 percent to 50 percent savings if all the components were purchased and installed individually.

Regardless of the cost savings, it is a better way to conduct meetings. “When you see this in action, what is so interesting, is you find you are not just having these passive meetings,” Scitthelm said. “Everyone at the meeting is up around it. Everyone actively participates in the meeting. In the end, meetings are just way, way better.”

SIMO is shipping the product immediately.

