

Integrated Solutions

SIMO's tech products are designed to make collaboration easy.

By Rob Kirkbride

If you are a dealer working in today's uncertain economic environment, you need products that will help you open doors. You need products that are unique and set you apart from the competition. SIMO Corp. executives believe its high tech collaborative technology — IMT - Interactive Meeting Technology and IMX - Interactive Meeting Xchange products can do just that.

Unlike some AV solutions, SIMO products are fully integrated. A dealer looking to add a tech product like this does not need to understand technology to sell, install or operate it. There is a single connection to plug it in and connect to the technology. Installation takes between 90 minutes and two hours.

SIMO's tech products are designed to make collaboration easy. IMT is a presentation tool which uses Smart Technologies for touch screen capabilities. The IMT enables users to switch between multiple functions and applications to create multi-media presentations. Capabilities include network access, auto recognition of data device inputs, integrated video conferencing, meeting recording and touch screen mark-up and navigation. The IMX is a multi-media network center created for small collaborative meetings. Features include 24/7 network connection, a device input system with control center and a large display. All features are factory installed into a package consisting of technology housing, table, and back drop. The optional integrated video conferencing package has a recessed HD camera and powered height adjustable base.

While walls were the last major shift for dealers, technology is poised to be the next, said Gary Scitthelm, chief executive office. "Walls were the last product to revolutionize dealers," he said. "I think technology is one of the biggest opportunities for dealers. By using technology to open doors, it is allowing dealers to expand sales and get into accounts that they have never been into before."

Shawn DeGreeve, market and communications lead at SIMO, said dealers are on the ground floor of a big shift as the market moves toward technology. "Customers are not just buying furniture, they are buying a space. All businesses need to work to increase productivity and effectiveness. Our products work hand in hand with that," he said.

SIMO is a bit different in that the company is selling through a company's IT department, not through the AV route. And that changes the way the company builds its products. SIMO's products are really more like conglomerated pieces of furni-

ture and technology bundled together to make collaboration easier. While SIMO's history is as a seating, boardroom table and casegood maker, the company has spent the last several years integrating technology into its goods.

The technology is supplied through SIMO's partner companies. The companies, like Smart, are good at creating technology, but have no desire to get into the furniture business. Yet SIMO's customers want the furniture, but might not know how to integrate it. That's where SIMO comes in. The company packages its furniture with the latest technology to transform it into something more — something much easier for a dealer to sell instead of the two pieces (technology and furniture) separately.

"When you go through the AV guys, you end up with something that you need an 18-year-old to explain with three different remotes," Scitthelm said. "We don't go the AV route, but the IT route and that changes the way we build our products. We are building products for the dumbest guy in the company, they are that easy to use. We simplified it. It makes sense to go through the (office furniture) dealers because the dealers are calling on the designers every single day. It has been interesting to see the adoption cycle."

The SIMO products help improve productivity in a visual, collaborative way. That makes them an easier sell, than office furniture, DeGreeve said. "For the end user, there might not be a capital budget for new desks, but there is always, always budget for technology that will improve processes," he said. "Knowledge is money now. Businesses make money from knowledge. We take the top functions from a business meeting and take a truly unique collaborative space and then take the best processes and make it simple."

SIMO is not alone in recognizing the need for blended technology and furniture to make collaboration easy. Steelcase's media:scape is on its second iteration. Vitra is working with a technology company to distribute AirShare, a system for wirelessly sharing information. Nucraft Furniture Co. also introduced Dialogue, a high-tech system that combines the most advanced audio and visual technology with the company's conference room furniture.

DeGreeve said SIMO's products are extremely easy to use and intuitive. "These are easy products for dealers to demonstrate," he said. "If they are easy to demonstrate, they are easy for end users as well. You don't know all the technology behind iPad, but you know how to run it. It is aesthetic technology. Our product looks really, really good. It is a good design."



We've engineered it in our factory so it is easy to use."

While some companies embed the technology, SIMO makes it easy to switch out technology as it rapidly changes. For example, several years ago, customers ordered SIMO products to work with DVD players. Since DVDs are rarely used, customers can simply swap out the players for the latest technology.

For dealers, SIMO products add a "wow" factor that can lead to other business. In fact, a dealer that carries SIMO attracted a client with its technology, which led to a \$300,000

furniture deal.

"Video conferencing is a \$3 billion industry," Scitthelm said. "We feel this industry is going to be as large as (the office furniture industry). What we are doing is putting them together. For dealers, it really changes the way they can meet their clients."

In the last nine months, SIMO's sales are up 57 percent, a development he attributes to the company's position in high tech, collaborative conferencing. ¶

