

Integrate

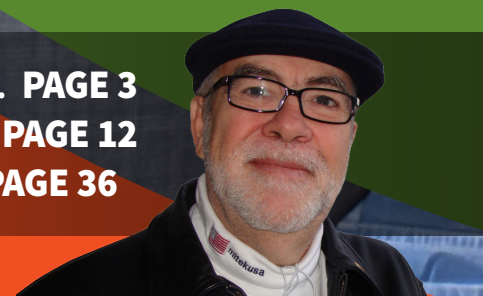


THE OFFICIAL TRADE JOURNAL OF NSCA | WINTER 2023



Entering 2024: Where Does the Industry Stand? PAGE 8

Inside the 2024 Business & Leadership Conference lineup. **PAGE 3**
A budget checklist to make sure your finances are on track. **PAGE 12**
Lloyd Ivey: A Legacy Statement from AtlasIED. **PAGE 36**



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TOM'S COLUMN



About BLC 2024

Get an inside look at the keynotes and general sessions at the 26th annual Business & Leadership Conference. *By Tom LeBlanc*

Long before I joined the NSCA team, the art and science of planning the Business & Leadership Conference (BLC) was perfected.

The NSCA team doesn't plan BLC content in a silo. We work with a BLC Planning Committee made up of industry peers, and we gather input from NSCA's Board of Directors. The goal is to pinpoint the big challenges integrators face and determine whether NSCA can make an impact in these areas by bringing leading thinkers to dig deeper.

Let's take a quick look at the keynotes and general sessions planned for BLC 2024:

- If you've attended BLC recently, then you know **Dr. Chris Kuehl**. He's NSCA's chief economist and the only BLC speaker we invite back annually. He'll provide his economic outlook, connecting the dots between macroeconomic factors and integrators' challenges. (He's also super funny.)
- **Meridith Elliott Powell** provides the second part of this finance one-two punch. She'll talk about the uncertainty Dr. Kuehl describes and how integrators can respond.
- To advise you on how to thrive in the chaotic state of the industry, **Michael Bonner** will share his leadership experience and help you think about uncertainty and disorder in a new way.
- A 19-year-old technology prodigy, **Tanmay Bakshi** has quickly become a leading thinker on AI. He's joining BLC to help you envision the possibilities of AI while carefully navigating its inherent challenges.
- As we double down on company culture, **Steve Thomas** will share some of the concepts he uses as he works with organizations to boost culture by making sure changes stem from leadership.
- Former New York Senator **Rick Lazio** joins NSCA CEO Chuck Wilson to talk about the business impact of 2024 being an election year. Expect a long Q&A and prepare your questions now.
- **Dr. Jessica Kriegel**, an accountability expert, will help you establish accountability among your team members when it comes to generating and maintaining profitability.



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BLC breakout sessions dive into industry issues even more than our strategic general sessions. Whether you're in leadership, finance, business development, operations, or HR, there will be a breakout session for you. When companies bring multiple team members to BLC, they share the keynote experiences while bringing back specific action steps from the breakouts based on their roles. This year, Powell, Bonner, and Kriegel are all leading their own breakout sessions, giving you the chance to work closely with these experts.

BLC is the most important event for integrators in 2024. Attendance is capped, so spaces are limited. Register now to make sure you don't miss out! 📅

Tom LeBlanc is executive director at NSCA. Contact him at tbleblanc@nsca.org.

Register for BLC 2024



Scan this QR code to register or visit www.nsca.org/blc.

BLC Fast Facts:

- Feb. 27-29, 2024, at Las Colinas Resort in Irving, TX
- Day 1 includes an NSCA Education Foundation industry charity golf outing
- Opening night dinner features awards recognition and a panel discussion with leading integration companies
- Two full days of content: keynotes, general sessions, and breakout sessions



Business & Leadership CONFERENCE



Annual State of the Industry Webcast

Jan. 17, 2024

Every year, *Commercial Integrator* (CI) partners with NSCA to offer integrators an up-to-date forecast and analysis of the year ahead. This year, *Security Sales & Integration* (SSI) will also participate in the report and corresponding webinar discussion.

Please join us for this one-hour webinar, which will dig into the profitability challenges that integrators face in 2024, as well as market factors that impact the state of the industry. Guests will include Tom LeBlanc, executive director of NSCA, and Dan Schmidtendorff, CEO of Communication Company and president of NSCA's Board of Directors. With CI and SSI Editor-in-Chief Dan Ferrisi as moderator, the discussion will touch on:

- The rapid rate of change integrators face and how they can adapt
- Economic variables that make it hard to plan strategically for 2024
- How to counterbalance shrinking hardware margins and not devaluing what you do
- The evolving battle and need for integrators to provide service-oriented solutions

Register Now



Business & Leadership Conference

Feb. 27-29, 2024 • Las Colinas Resort • Irving, TX

Don't be left out! Join the NSCA community at the 26th annual Business & Leadership Conference (BLC), where the theme is:

What the Best Integrators Are Doing Next.

See page 36 for more on BLC 2024 content.

Register Today www.nsca.org/blc



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Jan. 30, 2024, Vancouver

Feb. 6-7, 2024, San Diego

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IN THIS EDITION

- | | |
|--|--|
| 5 Calendar: Register Now for BLC 2024! | 22 Partner Content: How Integrators Can Leverage Photography by Supervox |
| 6 Research: Guide to State Licensing | 24 Partner Content: 5 Reasons Your Customers Resist Financing by GreatAmerica |
| 7 Research: Financial Analysis of the Industry | 26 Member Updates |
| 8 Factors Contributing to the State of the Industry | 38 NSCA's BLC: Business Intelligence Meets Community Camaraderie |
| 12 Preparing for 2024: Budget Checklist | 40 10 Cost-Saving Steps by Chuck Wilson |
| 15 Preparing for 2024: 3 Tips | |
| 16 Your Trade Association's Perspective on AI | |
| 20 Partner Content: Understanding ERC Scams by alliantgroup | |

Grab a Copy of the New Guide to State Licensing

A comprehensive overview of the latest licensing requirements and state codes for each U.S. state.



FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF THE INDUSTRY 2023 IS HERE

An updated report to help you benchmark your business profitability and efficiency.



Licensing in the systems integration industry is confusing. For electrical work, the National Electrical Code (NEC) serves as the basis for licensing. But, for commercial technology systems, laws vary from state to state (and sometimes within the same state).

Our advice: Always check the state (and the specific county or city) in which you've got a project scheduled *before* you do any work to make sure you meet the requirements.

In some cases, there may be no statewide licensing requirements for certain technology systems. In some states, you may not need a license to do fire alarm system work; in other states, however, fire alarm systems may be the only type of low-voltage system where a license is required to do work.


How do you keep it all straight, especially when the state laws governing installation of low-voltage systems change all the time?

NSCA has a resource that can help: our **Guide to State Licensing**. You've been asking for an updated version, and we made it happen!

Just updated in late 2023, this new version presents a comprehensive overview of the latest licensing requirements and state codes for each U.S. state.

For each state, the new *Guide to State Licensing* covers:

- Alarm system requirements
- Electrical contractor/electrician requirements
- Low-voltage/limited-energy requirements
- Approved reciprocal states
- Other contractor license requirements (GC, etc.)
- License types and associated fees
- Which version of the NEC the state follows
- Relevant state contact information

The *Guide to State Licensing* is a valuable tool that puts licensing requirements at integrators' fingertips. The guide also offers a one-page quick reference sheet at the back of the document that outlines requirements for electrical/contractor, low-voltage, and alarm/security system work in each state. 

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

We routinely ask systems integrators to participate in a survey about how they run their businesses. This allows us to compile information you can use to benchmark and compare your expenses, profits, sales, and other data against industry peers of similar size and business focus.

This summer, we conducted the survey once again and used the results to create an updated **Financial Analysis of the Industry** report for 2023.

Several metrics are collected and reported on:

- Company revenue (including RMR)
- Largest projects and customers
- New customer acquisition
- Numbers of full-time and part-time staff
- Overall financial health
- Prevalent systems and technologies
- Project backlog
- Project review processes
- Remote workforces
- Success in specific vertical markets

The information presented in the new *Financial Analysis of the Industry* report provides an in-depth look at integrator operations and dynamics; it also helps NSCA members better understand the financial health of their companies and their firm's performance compared to others. In addition, the report includes a summary of the biggest challenges integrators anticipate in future years, including recruiting and supply chain issues.


The report is one-of-a-kind, offering a direct industry comparison instead of a comparison between similar sectors. Many companies use this data to determine the true cost of doing business. The benchmarks here allow you to set metrics and parameters to manage and increase accountability.

We recommend that your leadership team take time to review the updated findings outlined in this report. It's an opportunity to find areas of improvement, confirm that you're on the right path, and create KPIs and strategic imperatives.

You can plug the benchmarks and metrics from NSCA's *Financial Analysis of the Industry*, **Labor Installation Standard**, and **Compensation & Benefits Report** in to your financial software tools to make sure your projects are profitable. NSCA's Project **Simulation Tool** is another tool to determine project profitability.

As you review the *Financial Analysis of the Industry*, be sure to reference NSCA's standard chart of accounts in our **Essentials Online Library**. This was developed specifically for integrators and is a great tool to help you determine what's above and below the line for projects.

When it comes to next steps, NSCA staff are here to assist as you work through the report and other NSCA business resources. For guidance and a deeper dive into NSCA benchmarks and metrics, don't hesitate to contact us.

And be sure to watch this **on-demand webinar**, where we help you understand key trends and allow you to fully leverage this tool to improve your business. 

[DOWNLOAD NOW!](#)

Entering 2024: Where Does the Industry Stand?

Here are 11 factors contributing to the state of the integration industry as NSCA members prepare for a new year. *By Tom LeBlanc*

NSCA loves data, but there's more to understanding what integrators face than crunching some numbers. While we encourage you to dive into the data presented in NSCA's newly released *Financial Analysis of the Industry* so you can build KPIs, we also encourage you to take stock of subjective market circumstances as we enter 2024.

When NSCA CEO Chuck Wilson and I talk to *Commercial Integrator* Editor Dan Ferrisi about the state of the industry during our annual webinar, we don't stick to reporting survey results. We also discuss what NSCA members are telling us about the obstacles they face and what keeps them up at night.

With that goal in mind, here are 11 factors (tangible, intangible, objective, and subjective) that help define the state of the integration industry as we enter 2024.

1. Profitability Remains Elusive

There's lots for integrators to be optimistic about as we enter the new year. There are tremendous opportunities now and in the immediate future for integration professionals to help customers do their work better and be successful.

However, there are also *big* caveats. Market challenges like inflation, lingering supply chain challenges, product availability hiccups, etc. make it hard for integration professionals to be profitable. Also, technology and customers' needs are evolving, and your company needs to evolve just as quickly.

So, there are great opportunities—but they are coupled with challenges. One thing NSCA continues to emphasize to integrators is the importance of empowering financial leadership.

Profitability is challenging, and we know that financial leaders are critical in this challenging market. They're the ones who can put in processes and standards in place to make sure jobs are profitable and that only the right projects are taken on. It's essential for integration firm owners to make sure they have strong financial leaders in place—and that they empower those leaders to make impactful changes.

NSCA's updated *Financial Analysis of the Industry* will help. It reports on key financial ratios among NSCA integrators, and analyzes financial trends among small, medium and large integrators, so member companies can compare themselves to companies of similar size and to the industry overall.

Forward-thinking integrators understand the value of benchmarking. They celebrate where they're ahead, and they react when they're behind. The key to this process is using industry-specific, credible reports like this as a guide to creating KPIs. It helps you benchmark profitability vs. the rest of the industry. It also helps you benchmark your backlog in comparison to other companies.

to the office safely. Some are considering hybrid models. They want communication and collaboration solutions to encourage productivity and connectedness. Technology like unified communication and collaboration tools didn't used to be mission critical, but they're much important now that corporate customers need hybrid workforces. Integrators are critical partners in making this happen.

3. Explosion of Endpoints

Integrators are also well positioned to be at the epicenter of an explosion of IoT devices. Are you ready for this IP endpoint environment? Are your people trained for what is needed today and tomorrow?

If your answer is "no" to either of these questions, then you must move quickly. The industry and demand are moving ahead, whether you're ready or not. IoT is the fastest-growing technology trend in connected technologies and smart buildings. It will be a \$520 billion market in 2024. These devices will be connected primarily through Power over Ethernet, so it's a great opportunity for integrators.

Forward-thinking integrators understand the value of benchmarking. They celebrate where they're ahead and react when they're behind.

2. Integrators Have Become Mission Critical

Integrators are well positioned to connect the dots for their customers, as the systems you install become mission critical. "Mission critical" used to refer only to systems in command-and-control centers. Now, with remote work and reliance on digital presentation, communication, smart security, and healthy building technology, so much of what you do is mission critical.

In the education market, integrators are obviously mission critical. You bring disparate systems together to make life easier and safer for administrators, staff, students, and parents. If they don't feel comfortable teaching due to safety concerns, communications challenges, or other obstacles related to technology or system complexity, then teachers may take their qualifications elsewhere.

By bringing guidelines from the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS) to the table to show schools, security teams, and fire marshals what they can do to create safer places, you become a trusted advisor—not just an installer.

Another mission-critical example is the corporate environment. So many customers are trying to figure out how to bring their teams back

4. Emergence of Proptech

The role of an integrator has shifted. It's no longer about individual systems; it's about the platform. AV, building control, security, life safety, etc. operate on a platform, and integrators have to be vital players in being able to manage them all.

Proptech (property technology) is a function of building contracts and tenant or occupant buildout. As a proptech provider, you can help create an ideal workplace, improve Class-A office space, and make sure amenities are conducive to coming back into the office environment.

Doing this improves occupancy rates and income for building owners and creates higher value for the tenants in those spaces.

5. Being a Master Systems Integrator

A master systems integrator goes beyond being part of a tenant buildout and becomes part of the construction contract from the start, focusing on things like lighting, fire control, physical security, and energy management.

If you don't deliver this, you'll need to narrow in on a specific niche and be incredibly strong in that area.

It's also critical for integrators to know how to bolt on adjacent technologies. While you don't have to do everything, you need be really good at knowing how to connect devices in an IP environment so you can monitor and provide managed services.

If your future involves focusing on big-picture customer objectives and being a master systems integrator, then it's essential to have the right people in place. This new building ecosystem requires different skills than what you're used to. The people you hire won't necessarily be carrying around a toolkit and installing solutions. Instead, you'll be hiring people based on what they can do to program points of integration between systems.

7. IT Spending Trends

Managed services trends and patterns point to integrators needing to make sure they grow IT expertise.

The *Financial Analysis of the Industry* breaks down typical integrators' IT spending, including what integrators typically spend on IT staff. IT continues to become a focus for companies due to increased security needs with staff growth. Larger companies seem to spend a greater percentage of overhead costs on IT. Smaller companies don't spend as much.

This reflects a big challenge for companies not focusing on IT.

8. Continued Legislative Battles

Through 2024, we expect legislative bills that may impact your business. We spend a lot of time behind the scenes (currently tracking over 400 bills) watching for and responding to legislation that pops up in states and jurisdictions across the country that might negatively affect integration businesses. This could include legislation that limits your right to install Power over Ethernet, for example.

We're part of a consortium of other trade associations and industry leaders that go to battle on these issues, so we have a strong, collective industry voice that speaks out on your behalf.

Visit www.nscs.org/track-legislation to get involved.

10. Training

Everybody is talking about AI, machine learning, robotics, and the list goes on. In addition to learning about new technology, many integration companies are aggressively trying to create better efficiency within their back office.

This all creates an escalating need for continuous training, and it comes at a time when profitability is tenuous. We hear from members who take workers out of the field for training, but technologies and needs are evolving so quickly that it feels like they're learning about something that will soon be outdated—and, thus, is a waste of time. It's a frustrating cycle.

11. The AI Factor

NSCA spent a good portion of the recent Pivot to Profit conference talking about AI, and that theme will carry over to our 2024 Business & Leadership Conference (BLC) in late February.

But the conversation next year at BLC will be lots different than when we talked about it at Pivot to Profit in October. AI is exciting, but that's not the whole story. There's concern about AI replacing jobs.

For instance, while it's exciting that AI might prove helpful engineering, drafting, and code writing, it's important to consider that your customer hired *you* to do those tasks. You must also understand the impact of relying on a non-human-generated solution.

Forward-thinking integrators will no doubt dive into AI to figure out how it impacts their companies and how to use it safely. (See page 16 for more.) ▲

These 11 factors aren't the only issues contributing to the state of the integration industry, but they're the ones we hear most about. To continue discussions like these, make sure you attend our 2024 Business & Leadership Conference. Visit www.nscs.org/blc to claim your spot.

The integration industry seems to exist in a bubble, which creates an inherent recruiting challenge.

6. Continued Shift to Recurring Revenue

NSCA has tracked the industry's slow shift from product- and project-based revenue models to recurring, services-oriented revenue for quite a while. Data from our *Financial Analysis of the Industry* shows that only about 12% of the industry's revenue is recurring. The needle isn't moving very much.

What is changing, however, is the conversation around recurring revenue. Discussions used to be in the context of being good for your business. Now it's about what customers want: ongoing support for mission-critical solutions. If they can't get this level of service from their integrator, then they'll get it somewhere else.

Even the most common systems are shifting to the network. You can put in the systems, of course, but if that's where your services stop, then you aren't solving customers' challenges. You need to provide the managed services that deliver what they need.

9. Recruiting

You can't talk about factors impacting the industry without talking about how integrators are struggling with talent recruitment and retention. In addition, many integrators are also focused on ramping up in-house IT expertise to compete and provide ongoing networked support for customers.

The integration industry seems to exist in a bubble, which creates inherent recruiting challenges. If you're inside the bubble, then you know about the awesome projects the industry completes and the significant business challenges being solved for customers. You also know about the rewarding career opportunities. If you're outside the bubble, however, you don't even know the exists!

That's why NSCA launched Ignite a few years ago. Visit IgniteYourCareer.org to learn more about how we're making a difference when it comes to workforce development.

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Are Your Budgets Cleared for Takeoff?

Even the most experienced construction executives can forget important aspects of budgeting preparation. This checklist can help make sure your budget is ready. *By Eric Morris*

Do you know why skilled pilots still use preflight checklists? Because even the most experienced pilots know they can forget a critical aspect of their routine. That's why they utilize a systematic process: to ensure that they remember to check crucial issues before takeoff.

Likewise, even the most experienced construction executives can forget important aspects of budgeting preparation. To prevent the omission of a critical element that could devastate your budget, we created a budget checklist for you to use.

For your convenience, the budget checklist questions are grouped into seven major categories of concern during budget creation:

1. Realistic Growth
2. Data-Driven Assumption
3. Stakeholder Collaboration
4. Plan-B Creation
5. Strategic Alignment
6. User Friendliness
7. Clear Communications

A deficiency in any of these areas could lead to an unsuccessful budget implementation. Each category relates to different people within your organization who must participate in the budgeting process.


The purpose of the checklist is to focus management's attention on the areas that require more coordination before finalizing the budget.

Any checklist questions that elicit a "no" response could indicate an area that requires deeper consideration and immediate attention as you prepare your coming year's budget. It's likely that even the most experienced budget preparers will have some "no" answers on the checklist

A second, but equally important, objective of using the checklist is to teach the operations team what issues they should consider when drafting budgets. The checklist can be a powerful learning opportunity. Managers are given the opportunity to present their opinions on the best way to rectify issues that arise from their checklist responses.

Still another byproduct of using the checklist is the opportunity to alert owners regarding areas in which their current financial systems aren't producing sufficient critical data to adequately complete the checklist. If someone responds "no" to a question due to lack of data, it's time to consider the risk of not capturing this vital information.

Does a pilot's preflight checklist ensure a flawless flight? No, but the checklist is still a prudent process to follow. Will the use of this budget preparation checklist ensure that a prudent and achievable budget is always drafted? No... but it definitely helps.

Good luck with your budgeting. Let's hope it's a smooth flight. 

Eric Morris is CFO at NSCA member company Wayne Automatic Fire Sprinklers Inc. In addition to his CFO duties, Eric is also an expert for the TeamStrength Financial Leaders Forum, a peer forum that gathers mid-market CFOs and controllers to share best practices and discuss their biggest challenges.

BUDGET OBSTACLE CHECKLIST

1. Realistic Goals Y / N

- Are sales targets based on previously attainable growth rates?
- Will competition allow the ability to capture additional market share?
- Are cost reductions achievable without hindering existing processes?
- Have geographic or product-line expansions been researched?
- Are existing demands being met with the staffing in place today?

2. Data-Driven Assumptions Y / N

- Are gross-margin levels consistent with prior achievable levels?
- If gross-profit levels are assumed to rise, then do you have solid, trustworthy data to support this assumption?
- Has the cost of new staffing been confirmed with available market-price data?
- Is the current backlog of work under contract consistent with budget assumptions?
- Does the budget contain assumptions that are substantiated by data?

3. Stakeholder Collaboration Y / N

- Have ops managers been consulted about manpower requirements of projected sales levels?
- Has the sales team been surveyed about projected sales for each salesperson?
- Has the design/engineering team been asked about their capacity levels?
- Has purchasing been consulted regarding the availability of key components?
- Has HR been consulted if staffing increases are contemplated?

4. Creating a Plan B Y / N

- Has a Plan B budget been created to address a sales plummet of more than 20%?
- Have break-even levels been calculated for various levels of gross-profit percentages?
- Has a cash burn rate been calculated on budget levels of anticipated operations?
- Has a what-if manpower scenario been determined if revenues increase substantially?
- Has a step-cost increase in overhead been calculated for a substantial increase in revenue?

5. Strategic/Growth Alignment Y / N

- Does the budget reduce short-term goals that may restrict long-term growth?
- Is the budget free of conflicting budget assumptions (e.g. market share or GP % growth)?
- Does the budget plan contain funding for long-term initiatives?
- Do incentive payment plans encourage long-term initiatives/growth plans?
- Do ops managers fully understand the company's long-term strategy?

6. User Friendliness Y / N

- Are budget templates user-friendly enough to complete in a relatively short period of time?
- Is the data required to complete the budget readily available to ops managers?
- Have ops managers been sufficiently trained in how to complete budget templates?
- To complete budgets, is the need for manual data entry reduced?
- Do managers know which key assumptions drive the budget?

7. Clear Communications Y / N

- Has the link between the annual budget and strategic objectives been fully explained?
- Are managers regularly held accountable for explaining budget variances?
- Have you considered the impact of using the budget results to drive incentive plans?
- Have you considered the impact of using the budget for staff evaluations?
- Have you considered the budget's impact on company programs, such as 401(k) employer contributions?



READ *Integrate* EVERY QUARTER AT [NSCA.org](https://www.nscanet.org)

Integrate

3 TIPS for Effective 2024 Planning

Check out this round-up of best practices you can implement for 2024 to improve financial performance, along with the resources we offer to support them.

When's the last time you felt too prepared? Probably never. We rarely hear integrators complain about over-preparation. Instead, it's quite the opposite. Integrators often scramble to react to what's happening right in front of them, wishing they had more time to plan and prepare.

With 2024 around the corner, we brought the NSCA Community together in a roundtable discussion to offer you some planning best practices for the year ahead. If you weren't able to attend, or need a refresher, we thought we'd recap those best practices here.

1. Structure Your Sales Compensation for RMR Growth

It's no secret that salespeople will often focus on selling whatever comes with the greatest reward. Thus, the lack of a proper sales compensation structure has held many integrators back from offering more managed services to their customers.

Even though managed services produce nearly double the margin and three times more value for integration firms, many integrators' current compensation structures pay similar commission (or less commission) per revenue dollar when managed services are sold.

Due to the additional effort it takes to tie managed services to a project, rewarding sellers on the front end of a managed services opportunity is vital. It's also important to establish a recognized revenue commission: an ongoing annuity stream that your sellers receive on a monthly or annual basis for the recognized managed services revenue they manage. This encourages excellent customer experiences, high renewal rates, and continued account growth.

To help you get started, download [this sales compensation plan](#), created by NSCA Member Advisory Councilmember Revenueify. It provides guidance, examples, and illustrations of how you can build a compensation plan to support your managed services platform and drive subscription services.

2. Monitor 24 Important Financial Metrics

There are 24 metrics that all leaders with P&L responsibility need to track. We created a document that explains them all—and why you need to monitor them.

Take revenue per employee, for example. The makeup of your business—internal vs. outsourced labor, amount of managed services revenue, etc.—determines the number you should set as a key health indicator. Finding the right number and managing your adherence to it is a key metric and should be an internal year-over-year comparison, as well as a comparison to industry indexes.

You can also compare your metric to the data presented in our [Financial Analysis of the Industry report](#) to see how you rank among other integrators.

Download [this financial checklist](#) to get started.

3. Choose the Right Partners

The right partnerships—with vendors and customers—can help you along your journey.

Are you working with channel-friendly vendors? (These vendors move product through you while supporting your sales efforts and using their marketing platforms to create demand and provide lead generation.) One way to make sure is to use our [vendor scorecard](#).

This tool was developed several years ago to help integrators evaluate manufacturers and distributors and develop their own preferred vendor program. Over time, we've made many customizations, additions, and expansions to the scorecard. It has also helped our members make some pretty big decisions about who to work with—and who not to.

Now, what about customers? Many NSCA members pretend—or even believe—that they're "winning" on a project when, in reality, they'd be better off leaving that job behind and moving on to something else.

Our [Project Contribution Simulator Tool](#) can help you determine whether a project will be profitable. Within the tool, you can adjust billing rates and utilization, as well as costs of goods, to simulate real-life scenarios.

We also created what we call a ["go/no-go" matrix](#) that you can use to make decisions about partnerships. Simply answer the list of questions, and you'll be able to confidently determine whether to move forward or not. 📍



WATCH THE ROUNDTABLE IF YOU MISSED IT

Want to learn more about these tools and how to use them? You can also [watch the archived discussion](#) any time.

Happy 2024 planning!



AI in Business: Where Are We Today, and How Far Do We Have to Go?

If you're going to use AI in business, then the rewards can be great—but only after you understand the risks.

By Leah Grout Garris

AI is getting ready to explode. Case in point: The generative AI market is predicted to grow to \$1.3 trillion over the next 10 years from only \$40 billion last year.

There's much speculation about how AI will redefine work, but what does it mean from a business standpoint? How will AI impact what you do as an integrator?

The topic is so critical that, recently, the White House even issued a landmark Executive Order on the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence.

At NSCA's Pivot to Profit (P2P) 2023, experts discussed these critical points—and attendees learned some valuable lessons along the way. Here, we cover just a few of the considerations and takeaways covered in P2P's AI-focused sessions.

How AI Is Being Used by Integrators Today

While many examples were shared of how integrators and industry manufacturers are applying AI in business, these two use cases were high on the list.

1. Internal Operations within Integration Firms

One example shared by Quang Trinh, business development manager of platform technologies (IoT and AI) at Axis Communications, involves running an internal model that queries support documentation and then provides that information back to partners using natural language processing. This makes troubleshooting faster and easier.

The more people who use the tool, the better it becomes, which makes customer service more efficient.

Another example: Many companies already use AI in business to create meeting transcriptions and summaries. This comes in handy when someone is double-booked: They attend one meeting and send a personal AI assistant to the other to "listen" and report back on key points and potential to-dos.

2. Helping Clients Improve Building Operations

AI is also slowly on the rise within commercial buildings, working in the background to help facilities run more efficiently. And integrators are finding ways to apply AI for clients to help them improve their building operations.

For example, installing occupancy sensors in a meeting room allows the heating, cooling, ventilation, and lighting systems to adjust in real time based on room usage, which is assessed through AI. This not only improves comfort but also reduces energy costs. Spaceti rolled this technology out in a building in Denmark, and that facility now sees utility bills that are 70% lower than they were previously.

"AI has the ability to look beyond what humans consider—or can even comprehend—as variables in system performance. So many factors impact HVAC control, for example," explained Aakash Ravi, cofounder and chief growth officer at Spaceti. "Wind speeds, ocean currents, the position of the moon. There's so much data out there that it isn't possible for humans to correlate it all—but AI can."



AI is like outsourcing. It lets you focus on providing a better customer experience and adding more value to the process. But, to use AI, you need to have skillsets that many people don't have today.

—Mike Boettcher, NSCA President and President at EDGE



The Risks of Using AI in Business

At the end of the day, however, integrators are technologists—not data scientists or lawyers. The industry has lots to learn about AI’s impact on things like security, ethics, and privacy—and integrators must understand where the biggest risks lie and the serious implications they can pose. Even legislators and lawmakers are struggling to wrap their minds around what is AI—and what it isn’t.

Here’s what our experts warned attendees to watch out for:

Trust and Verification

If you’re going to use AI in business, then you must know that you can trust it—and the data it provides to you. What is the source of the AI data? Is that source valid? Is the data verifiable?

Today, responsible verification requires humans in the loop and some manual pre-processing before the data can be applied to create algorithms or improve AI performance through machine learning.

Privacy and Protection

Respecting privacy is important—a critical consideration especially when cameras and sensors integrate AI for monitoring and reporting purposes.

“There’s been a lot of angst about the increased level of monitoring that comes with AI systems, even given the benefits it provides,” Trinh pointed out. “The industry needs to do a better job of educating the public on the real benefits of these systems instead of talking about the technology. We can do more when it comes to communicating about ethics, what we’re doing with data, and the standards we’re holding ourselves to.”

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–Quang Trinh, Business Development Manager of Platform Technologies (IoT and AI) at Axis Communications

Consider the use case we mentioned earlier about summarizing meeting notes: Will people be as open in sharing their thoughts, concerns, and ideas if they know that everything is being recorded and will be ‘discoverable’ later?” asked Sid Bose, partner at Ice Miller.

Content Ownership

Many companies are using generative AI (like ChatGPT) to create content: to write an email, for example. But who owns that content? Where will it ultimately go? Who gets credit for that work? Is the content pulled from accurate information that makes sense?

When writing an email, then the consequences may not be dire—but if you’re relying on AI to build a business case or write a proposal, then that’s another story.

If you place code you prepared into a generative AI platform to help you create content, will the code be protected? Who owns the code at that point? Can someone else use it? Does it become public?

What if you used AI to help create the code in the first place? Can you tell your customer they own it—even though you didn’t create it? If something goes wrong, then what?

While there are many opportunities to consider, there are also many questions that must be answered when you go down this road.

AI in Business: Where It Stands Today

Currently, AI is more about “automation intelligence” vs. “artificial intelligence.” In other words, how can it be used to automate processes and workflows?

According to Microsoft’s **2023 Work Trend Index**, 74% of employees struggle with having enough time and energy to do their jobs effectively. In addition, the average employee spends:

- **57%** of their time communicating in meetings, emails, and chat
- **43%** of their time creating documents, spreadsheets, and presentations

“Members should embrace the benefits of AI but do so with awareness aware of the risks. From intellectual property and trade secret implications to issues of fairness and discriminatory outcomes, AI is still untested and evolving.”

–Sid Bose, Partner at Ice Miller

And while nearly half of respondents say they’re worried that AI will replace their jobs, 70% say they would delegate as much work as possible to AI if it lessened their workloads.

Take healthcare, for example. Instead of sending a nurse to get patient medication, a robot can visit the pharmacy, collect the necessary drugs based on the prescription, and bring them back to the nurse. Meanwhile, the nurse can spend more time with patients. AI isn’t replacing the nurse’s job—it’s augmenting it.

“AI is like outsourcing. It lets you focus on providing a better customer experience and adding more value to the process. But, to use AI, you need to have skillsets that many people don’t have today,” explained Mike Boettcher, NSCA president and president at EDGE. “I’ve heard people say, ‘AI is not going to take your job. The person who knows how to use AI is the one who will take your job.’”

Another important note about integrators and AI is that this will be an evolving topic. The conversation about AI at Pivot to Profit was undoubtedly different than the AI discussions being planned for the 2024 Business & Leadership Conference.

Meanwhile, the White House Executive Order on the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence, alluded to earlier, also notes the rapid rate of change related to AI. The fact that an Executive Order (EO) was issued is “a recognition of the significant impact that AI has had (and will have) on all of us,” says Bose. “The EO laid out a number of important considerations in the use and proliferation of AI. And members should embrace the benefits of AI but do so with awareness aware of the risks. From intellectual property and trade-secret implications to issues of fairness and discriminatory outcomes, AI is still untested and evolving. The upside is huge. But adoption should be undertaken in a responsible, diligent, and conscientious manner.”

| Leah Grout Garris is NSCA’s director of marketing.

WANT MORE?

Don’t miss the AI-focused sessions at the 2024 Business & Leadership Conference. Register at nsc.org/blc-2024-register.



Business & Leadership CONFERENCE





IRS Intensifies Efforts to Combat ERC Scams: Consider Getting a Second Opinion

Many third parties are improperly computing the ERC and aggressively misleading business owners. Here's what you need to know. By Rick Meyer

The IRS has been warning businesses against using third parties for the Employee Retention Credit (ERC). Why? Because many of these third parties are improperly computing the credit and aggressively misleading business owners.

The IRS is now taking an even larger step to combat fly-by-night providers. On Sept. 14, 2023, the IRS issued **IR-2023-169** with a moratorium on processing new ERC claims until the end of December. But don't panic! ERC qualifications have not changed, and you can still file.

In fact, the IRS is still encouraging businesses to file legitimate claims, but it's imploring businesses to first review their claims with a trusted tax professional that understands the complex ERC rules—not with a promoter or marketer interested only in profit.

This step will allow the IRS to:

1. **Add more safeguards to prevent future abuse.**
2. **Protect businesses from predatory tactics.**
3. **Work with the Department of Justice to combat aggressive marketing and incorrect ERC claims.**

If you haven't yet heeded the warnings, take the IRS' latest move as a sign that it's time to be serious. But remember: The IRS still wants businesses that qualify to claim the credit. NSCA members have qualified and are receiving lucrative returns.

ERC Horror Stories

There's a good reason why the IRS wants you to be careful about who you choose as your provider. Many promoters that sprung up during the pandemic are conducting ERC evaluations in minutes and not properly substantiating claims.

For a claim to qualify, a business needs to show either **a decline in gross receipts** or that their **business operations were disrupted** due to a qualifying governmental mandate.

Further, the impact on the business needs to be **more than nominal**. This is the IRS' way of saying that a minor impact won't do.

Check out this actual case study from a wary client that turned to us once they realized they may not have partnered with the most reputable provider the first time around.

The Real Tale of an Equipment Manufacturer

After a few short phone calls with an ERC provider, this manufacturer was informed that, based on cancelled trade shows, it qualified for an ERC claim amounting to more than \$750,000.

The manufacturer signed an agreement with that ERC provider based on that estimate. Later, they contacted their CPA about the agreement and the credit calculations. Even in the early stages, the client sensed that something was off.

The CPA expressed skepticism immediately, with concern about a lack of evidence to substantiate a claim that large. Having worked with alliantgroup before, the CPA contacted for us a second opinion. He remembered the lengths we went to to substantiate other ERC claims, and he wanted to see if this claim would stand up to that level of scrutiny.

Here's a summary of our analysis for qualification, and how the equipment manufacturer stacked up:

- ✓ **Gross receipts.** There was no significant decline in gross receipts.
- ✓ **Qualifying business disruption.** There was no evidence showing that the trade shows were cancelled due to government orders, nor evidence showing that the trade shows were cancelled at all.
- ✓ **More than nominal impact.** The analysis didn't show a nexus between the closure of trade shows, the manufacturer's supply chain issues, and the manufacturer's more-than-nominal impact.
- ✓ **Qualifying mandates.** The government order referenced was simply the emergency declaration—not a specific government order applicable to the manufacturer's suppliers.
- ✓ **Substantiation and documentation.** The analysis stated that the manufacturer had to wait longer for materials but made no mention as to how long—or how much longer—they had to wait in comparison to 2019.

As a result, we advised the manufacturer not to file the claim. They were able to disengage the ERC provider, and we were able to get the manufacturer's downpayment refunded.

The manufacturer subsequently came to us to do a new ERC study correctly.

Moral of the Story

When it comes to the ERC, it's the wild, wild west. The smell of gold (fast, easy fees) has lured pop-up ERC providers to promise the world without doing the necessary, exact, and meticulous research and documentation to properly qualify and quantify a company for ERC.

Business owners need to tread carefully and ensure that they aren't falling for something that's too good to be true. While many companies can offer quick calculations or promise large returns, very few can substantiate their claims or provide the documentation necessary.

When exploring the credit, NSCA members need to ensure that they partner with a reputable provider to ensure that their claims stand up to scrutiny.

Even if you have absolute comfort with your ERC provider, perhaps a legal "second opinion" is in order. [▲](#)

Rick Meyer, CPA, MBA, has served on various tax committees over the past 40+ years. He is a director for NSCA Business Accelerator alliantgroup. He can be contacted at rick.meyer@alliantgroup.com.



At Exertis Almo, we're always adding new and exciting partners, products, services and resources tailored to your needs. In 2023, we added over 60 new vendor partners and service providers to help you do even more.

Together we'll do extraordinary things

Visit our website and see our full line card [exertisalmo.com/brands](https://www.exertisalmo.com/brands)



A Marketing Must: GOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

Stop treating photography as an afterthought.
Here's what you should do instead.

Every integrator has its own story to tell. The better you convey that story in your marketing, the more you'll stand out in the marketplace. But how can you communicate what makes you distinctive? In a digitally dominated world, original photography can be a powerful differentiator and highly effective tool to help tell the truth about who you are and what you do.

Too often, however, integrators tell us they don't have a photo library. The project's over, it's too far away, and they have no one to take pictures—or the budget for shooting.

They want to know: "Can we just use stock photography?"

**The answer: Yes. But, in so doing,
you'll look like everyone else.**




Supervox
a creative agency

Stop treating photography as an afterthought.
Here's what you should do instead.

- **Commit to shooting original photography**, especially for the highest-visibility portions of your website: the homepage, staff pages, important case studies, etc. Use the photography on social media. Use it in outbound marketing. Make it part of your operational practice. Treat it as a planned expense.
- **Decide who's going to take the photos**. Build a relationship with a good photographer you can count on and won't have to negotiate with every time. If circumstances don't allow for a professional shooter, then look for people within your company who like taking pictures. You may have some serious talent in your midst. One thing is for sure: With today's phones, you already have serious camera technology on hand.
- **Take a coordinated approach to case studies**. Don't just photograph the final product! Capture the people working on it. Your passion, attention to detail, and teamwork are integral to the outcomes you achieve, and that can be captured in images and video. Shoot projects before you leave vs. trying to set up a shoot afterward. This way, you'll be able to include team members in the shot, and you'll eliminate the chance of being denied access later. (Before you do this, take a moment to de-clutter. You may not have a professional on hand, but do a quick survey of the room for trash, water bottles, and cords to remove or hide.)
- **Communicate your culture**. It's how you let customers know you're genuine and approachable. Show how your people go through their work lives. Consider inviting a photographer to a company event to capture the camaraderie of your team. Complement a pro's efforts with your own. It costs nothing to shoot as many photos as you'd like with your phone.
- **Set up a shared album or folder where staff can upload photos**. Creating a central repository for photos helps not only create a library you can draw on for marketing purposes, but also foster a more cohesive team culture.
- **Be consistent where it counts**. If your About Us page includes team member photos, then shoot them in a uniform manner. Whether you prefer more formal portraiture or candid shots, strive for consistency in lighting and framing. You're proud of your team, so use photography to give them their due!
- **Shoot in a way that gives you the greatest flexibility**. Shoot a subject with plenty of background above and to the sides so it's easy to use the shot in landscape or portrait layout. Also, make sure you shoot in a sufficient resolution to allow for enough detail—even after a photo has been cropped significantly.

Before you begin shooting, think about the story you want to tell. If you're documenting a project, then determine what you want the viewer to take away from it. Make sure to capture the images that will be necessary to tell that story.

After all, stories are how we communicate what makes us unique—and nothing brings stories to life like photography. 

| Supervox is an NSCA Member Advisory Councilmember.



5 REASONS Your Customer May Resist Financing

How to quell the concerns that arise during customer conversations about financing.

Customers often choose technology financing because it offers a predictable monthly payment for essential-use equipment. The result: a payment that has been carefully selected to fit within their monthly operating budget.

What's better than a full technology solution implementation at the cost of a convenient and affordable monthly payment over the course of several years? The ability to perpetually obtain new and advanced technology that's fully supportable by you, their service provider.

But selling technology isn't easy. When you first introduce the term "financing" into customer conversations, they may mention specific concerns. Here's how to quell them.

#1: Hidden or Surprise Fees

Some finance companies regularly hide fees within their lease. Your role is to provide the best technology solution within your customer's budget—and a budget that can be thrown off when a finance company slips in hidden fees.

Communicate all fees to customers so they know what to expect. (To learn more about fees associated with finance agreements, read **What Fees Should Your Customer Expect on Their Technology Lease?**)

Although it varies from company to company, the fees your customer can expect throughout a lease could include:

Origination Fees

The origination fee is a fixed fee to cover costs associated with reviewing and booking the transaction.

Interim Rent

Some leasing companies have a provision in their agreement that allows them to charge for the use of the equipment for the time between equipment installation and the commencement of the agreement. Depending on the recurring due date, this can result in a large, unexpected cash outlay.

Late Fees

As with most bills, leases are subject to late fees. The option to enroll in recurring ACH payments, along with other flexible avenues, can help avoid this.

#2: High or Unknown Residuals

There is no simple answer to the question: "What happens at the end of a lease agreement?"

Equipment documented on a fair market value, or FMV, lease has a lower payment over the term of the agreement because the equipment has residual value at the end of the 3- to 5-year term.

If your customer will consider purchasing the equipment at the end of term, then communicating with them about what they can expect for a residual will ensure that they aren't surprised at the end of term.

#3: Evergreen Clauses

With FMV or rental leases, leasing companies may require a letter of intent (LOI) at a certain time prior to the end of the term. This maps out what the customer intends to do with the equipment.

Some leasing companies will invoke an evergreen clause that allows the agreement to be automatically renewed for a set number of months (between six and 24) if the LOI is not received by a certain time. This locks your customer in to making additional payments beyond the initial term.

It's important to identify whether the lease agreement calls for a month-to-month or longer renewal. If your customer isn't comfortable with the renewal language, then the solution is simple: Communicate the intent prior to the terminating date.

#4: Long Credit Application Processes

When your customer decides to acquire your solution, it likely means they are ready to move now. They (and you) don't want to embark on a seemingly endless underwriting process where you're both waiting days for a response.

Work with a partner that can make decisions quickly and get back to you within hours—or sooner. Digital credit applications can help speed up the process.

#5: Poor Customer Service

Unhelpful auto-attendants, endless hold times, and customer service reps that aren't supportive—word travels fast in this industry (and on the internet). Your customers' tolerance level for poor service is low.

Make sure the partner you work with will pick up the phone to have a conversation with you or your customer. They should be easy to connect with and make everyone in the process feel at ease about finding satisfactory solutions.

The Key to Overcoming Resistance Is Conversation

Educate your customers to ensure that they trust you and feel comfortable and confident in you and the solutions you provide.

To learn more, visit www.nasca.org/greatamerica. 

GreatAmerica is an NSCA Business Accelerator.



The Latest from NSCA's Solution Provider Members

Unfiltered content provided directly from NSCA's manufacturer and solution provider members to keep integrators updated.



- AI panel
- Toolkit Talks at booth
- Dinner at AEC

Axis Communications, Inc.

We enjoyed meeting some of you at NSCA Pivot to Profit Tool Kit talks, the Artificial Intelligence panel, and/or our hosted dinner. Thank you for a great event! We are available to help all NSCA members with your product questions and projects. Please feel free to reach out to Chris Wildfoerster, program manager, audio (chrisw@axis.com), or your local Axis representative with questions or for more information about our Axis IP solutions and integrations, including:

- Network audio
- Network video
- Wearables
- Network intercoms
- Access control
- Video recorders and workstations
- System devices
- Analytics
- Video management software
- Audio management software

Visit our website to check out our **new product releases**. And remember, there are 16 **Axis Experience Centers (AEC)** spanning across the US, Canada, and Latin America. You are welcome to use our conference rooms and meeting spaces, at no cost, to bring your customers for discussions and demonstrations. Reach out to your local representative to schedule time at any of the AECs or to discuss your next project. You can be connected with your local AEC by calling 800.444.2947, option 1.

[Learn More](#)



VectorUSA

New Multisync® E Series Displays Feature Sleek Design with Workspace Essentials at a Cost-Conscious Price

For decades, IT/AV convergence was an industry buzzword, describing the intersection of traditional audiovisual integration and all those devices that lived on the network. Today, it's practically impossible to discuss AV without exploring the IT implications. But there's another discipline that is equally intertwined with AV: physical security.

[Lean More](#)

Cornell

At the October Pivot to Profit Conference, the NSCA executive director delivered a presentation on the future of building technology. He noted that connectivity is mission critical and encouraged integrators to embrace the concept of broad-based systems connectivity via Power over Ethernet technology. Cornell can help you get there. Our leading-edge Sentinel™ AOR system is a SIP, PoE-based Area of Refuge system designed to leverage and facilitate that connectivity. In addition, our technical training resources can help familiarize integrators with the many advantages of this emerging capability.

Learn More
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Dynacord

Dynacord SONICUE 1.3: Unleashing the Power of the MXE5 Matrix Mix Engine

SONICUE Sound System Software allows users to configure, operate, and control Dynacord electronics such as L, C, IPX, and TGX series power amplifiers and the MXE5 Matrix Mix Engine. It also enables customized system control through networked panel controllers such as the TPC1 and WPN1, or via the SONICUE Control app on Windows or iOS devices. With the latest version 1.3, SONICUE unleashes the power of the MXE5. Here's what's new:

Free DSP configuration

A highlight of version 1.3 is the introduction of free DSP configuration, which allows users to leverage the MXE5's open DSP architecture, providing unparalleled flexibility for structuring DSP configurations to meet unique project requirements. The software unleashes the full potential of the MXE5's signal processing capabilities, offering an extensive range of audio manipulation options with 36 inputs, 32 outputs and up to 128 x 128 internal crosspoints.

Enhanced Task Engine

SONICUE 1.3 also features an enhanced Task Engine that enables advanced logical tasking capabilities and seamless integration with third-party devices. Users can create system events with complex triggering options using the Task Engine. It is now possible to override scheduled events, allowing dynamic system response. In addition, the Task Engine facilitates integration with third-party devices, allowing external control of actions and devices within SONICUE while providing status updates to SONICUE Control devices. This opens new possibilities for system control and extends the MXE5's interoperability with external devices. In situations where complex DSP is not required, the semi-fixed zone mixer is still a time-saving option and still accessible in the software.

[Learn More and Download](#)



BZBGEAR

Dubbed the Swiss Army Knife of AV distribution, the BG-4K-VP and BG-4K-VPPRO series combine a 4K matrix switcher, video wall processor, and multiviewer for AV pros. The series offers versatile connectivity, high-quality visuals, advanced video processing, immersive audio, and user-friendly control. It is your ultimate AV solution—condensed and efficient!

Connectivity: The BG-4K-VP series is available in 4x4 and 8x8 models while the BG-4K-VPPRO series offers 4x4 and 9x9 configurations along with Power over Cable and signal extension to 70 m (230 ft) via category cables (CAT 5e/6/7).

Visual Quality: Supporting resolutions up to 4K60Hz 4:4:4, they deliver stunning visuals with clarity and color reproduction, thanks to its 18Gbps bandwidth.

Advanced Video Processing: They enable seamless switching, video wall creation, and multiview capabilities displaying multiple sources on a single screen. Preset settings simplify configuration.

Immersive Audio: Supporting Dolby 5.1, DTS 5.1, and analog audio extraction, it provides an immersive audio experience alongside visuals, ideal for presentations and conferences.

User-Friendly Control: With panel buttons, IR remote, TCP/IP, RS232 commands, and proprietary control software, users can easily manage and adjust settings. The free proprietary BG-SWITCH-CONTROL app empowers control on iOS, Android, and Windows.

Secure and Reliable: Built-in EDID settings ensure reliable connections. HDCP 2.2/1.4 compliance guarantees compatibility and content protection. The micro-USB port allows for firmware updates. Additional features include loop out, seamless matrix mode, advanced EDID management, video wall cascading, and balanced audio extraction.

[Learn More](#)



Jeron Electronic Systems, Inc.

Jeron Electronic Systems, Inc. is proud to offer healthcare facilities a new touchscreen workflow station option to support the extensive workflow functionality available on the Provider® 790 Nurse Call System. This new 24 Touchpoints Workflow Station can be readily configured to meet the unique needs of different types of nursing units and facilities. Each of the events can be configured for call placement, patient rounding, count-down timer, staff presence, inter-and intradepartmental workflows, patient status, patient rooming, or clinical sequencing.

Jeron has been manufacturing Made-in-the-USA life safety communication systems for over 59 years.

[Learn More](#)

Jetbuilt

In an era where technology is making many jobs redundant, it's little wonder that many would fear a new tool with the power to eliminate part of their workload. For Kinly, this fear turned to affection for a technology that makes their job more satisfying. Through Jetbuilt's cloud-based platform for proposal generation and project management, Kinly has entered a new era of operations. Kinly can better allocate resources and manage lead-in times, ultimately providing an improved client experience with a workflow that saves time and money and adapts to client needs, while the team can focus on building customer relationships.

[Learn More](#)



Exertis Almo

Ben Franklin had it right when he said, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." In other words, growth and success require calculated preparation – they don't just happen.

While we are still in the season of giving, now's the time to give yourself the gift of planning the next step in your career. Maybe this is the year you will incorporate AV services into your projects. Maybe you'll expand into a new vertical market. Or you will guide your company toward a more DEI-focused work environment.

Enter the perfect opportunity to plan to attend an Exertis Almo E4 Experience.

What is an E4 Experience, you ask?

Honored with a 2023, **SCN** Stellar Service Award and named a 2023 **Commercial Integrator** BEST winner, the E4 Experience is well-known throughout the AV industry as the **most valuable one-day education/training and product showcase**. It features a "crown jewel" showroom packed with the newest AV gear in use, making it a perfect place for integrators and resellers to bring their end users, along with a stacked lineup of enriching, certified business, technical, and trend sessions.

As opposed to a tradeshow based in one location, the E4 Experience travels to major cities across the US, four times per year. It is completely free of charge for attendees and includes parking, and a buffet-style breakfast and lunch. Here's where the E4 Experience is stopping in 2024:

- Washington, D.C., March 5
- Chicago, April 16
- Boston, Sept. 10
- Anaheim, CA, Oct. 8

Registration for the E4 Experience will open shortly. **In the meantime, you can save the date in your calendar now.** Build it in today before your time is populated with other work-related activity that pulls you away from your career goals.

To see a recap of the 2023 E4 Experiences, click on the links below:

- Dallas
- Santa Clara, CA
- Teaneck, NY
- Phoenix

[Learn More](#)





Legrand Partners with Microsoft to Create New Hybrid Conferencing Space

Legrand announces new advances with Microsoft to create a new hybrid conferencing space with Signature Microsoft Teams Rooms featuring products from Legrand, North and Central America. Signature Teams Rooms were developed to be immersive and inclusive meeting spaces enhanced for hybrid experiences that can be easily deployed at scale around the world.

Legrand proved to be a valuable partner because of the breadth of AV infrastructure, building controls, electrical infrastructure, lighting, and acoustics solutions. For these new showcase spaces, Legrand provided key components that helped simplify the typical order, delivery, and integration experience for Microsoft.

“Legrand is a great partner for Microsoft to work with because of the breadth of solutions they offer across the full room deployment,” said Sam Albert, principal product manager, The Hive, Microsoft Digital. “In the design of these specific Signature Teams Rooms, Microsoft Digital collaborated with the Legrand team in a hands-on process led by end-user feedback to create an optimal experience for them,” he said.

Explore the Legrand technology and furnishings that make up a typical Medium Signature Teams Room and a Microsoft Surface Hub Room at legrandav.com.

[Learn More](#)



Lightware

Lightware has recently released the Taurus TPX universal extender, allowing users to easily extend USB signals up to 100 meters. Previously, extending USB was only possible in a way that is complicated and prone to failure, and the Taurus TPX was developed to overcome the majority of these challenges. Together with their range of Full-featured USB-C AOC cables with unrivalled lengths and capabilities, Lightware offers an all-round solution for AV professionals to seamlessly integrate USB-C connectivity into meeting rooms and BYOD/BYOM applications.

[Learn More](#)

Lencore Acoustics

Lencore sound masking solutions offer unparalleled accuracy and clarity, creating a natural audio experience. Enjoy lightning-fast quotes and designs within 24 hours, keeping your projects on track. Plus, we never charge for quotes, ensuring informed decisions. With available inventory ready to ship in 48 hours, our systems are easy to work with and easy to install. Trust in our unrivaled 10-year warranty, a testament to our product quality and longevity. Choose Lencore for sound solutions that exceed expectations.

[Contact us today.](#)



INTELLISEE'S COMMITMENT TO SAFETY INCLUDES THE ETHICAL USE OF AI TO MAKE OUR WORLD SAFER.



IntelliSee

The White House recently issued an executive order outlining new standards for the safety, security, and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence, especially as it relates to privacy. IntelliSee supports this order and has always been committed to protecting the privacy of our end users and those they serve—not just because it's the law, but because it's what we believe is right.

Our technology was designed to identify risks such as the presence of guns, people, vehicles, slip risks, and other indicators of a potential threat as a means of keeping people as safe as possible. This will always be achieved with the highest ethical standards, which is why IntelliSee does not scan or retain personal features or facial recognition information whatsoever. We do not—nor will we ever—capture, store, or sell any data containing personally identifying information.

IntelliSee's commitment to both safety and privacy has always been valuable for end users, but now it's a requirement. Fortunately for our existing customers, it's a requirement that's already met. And for new installations, like Des Moines Public Schools, it's a testament to our responsibility of strengthening security without compromising the privacy of those we seek to protect.

[Learn More](#)





Owl Labs

We're wishing all NSCA members a warm and happy holiday season from Owl Labs!

The Owl Labs ecosystem features two smart cameras that deliver one powerful and productive meeting experience.

The **4K Owl Bar** and **360° Meeting Owl 3** sit at the front of the room and the center of the table to capture the best perspective, no matter where the discussion goes. The two cameras communicate to determine the best face-on view of in-room speakers to capture, so remote participants never miss a thing. Owl Labs offers the only front and center experience in-market that combines multiple camera streams into a single view, ensuring remote participants always see the best view of the room at the right time.

The Meeting Owl and the Owl Bar work together or as standalone devices to enable more productive hybrid discussions, no matter where team members are located.

To learn more about the Owl Labs ecosystem or becoming an Owl Labs Partner, visit our website, or contact us at resellers@owllabs.com.



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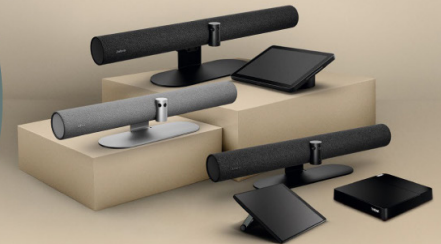
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PanaCast 50 Video Conferencing Solutions




Jabra PanaCast 50 Now Includes Enhanced Experiences!

Intelligent Speaker feature in Jabra PanaCast 50 unlocks more seamless collaborations by using voice profile information (max 10 per meeting) to recognize who said what in transcripts and recaps from a Microsoft Teams Room meeting, ensuring everyone is effortlessly seen, heard, and transcribed, whether in-person or joining remotely.

Jabra PanaCast 50 now boasts a groundbreaking feature: Intelligent Meeting Space. It's available as Value Pack 4 firmware updates in the latest service release 6.2.2.

This addition is nothing short of a game-changer, tailored especially for customers with meeting spaces featuring glass walls or open-plan layouts. It empowers IT administrators to define virtual meeting room spaces, which keeps the focus of the meeting on the people that are actually in the meeting without external distractions.

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Solutions360: Empowering Integrators with Purpose-Built ERP Solutions

Solutions360 continues to lead in the ERP software domain, enhancing our software and support teams to better serve technology integrators.

This quarter, Q360 saw significant improvements in sales, project management, accounting, and business analytics, streamlining operations and enhancing decision-making for our clients. For example, the quoting capabilities now allow for technology integrators to quote by floor, room, and system type to quickly quote multi-floor project.

You deserve a software partner with great customer service to help you get the most out of your investment. That's why we've expanded our customer support and training services, ensuring comprehensive assistance for our worldwide clientele.

As we forge into the future, our commitment to pioneering AI integration sets us apart. Our innovative drive propels the evolution of Q360, embedding sophisticated machine learning to unlock cutting-edge predictive analytics, streamline support systems, and automate key workflows. This technological leap not only elevates operational efficiency but also equips our clients with the strategic insights essential for market leadership. Internally, AI is the backbone of our relentless quest for excellence—refining our development, enriching communications, and elevating our educational resources. At Solutions360, we don't just adapt to change; we anticipate and shape it, ensuring that our dedication to breakthrough innovation and unrivaled customer care cements our status as the indispensable partner of choice in the ERP landscape for technology integrators.

If you're looking to elevate your business, reach out to Tim Archambault at tarchambault@solutions360.com or call 888.444.5047.

[Learn More.](#)

Stirling Communications

Stirling is now the exclusive distributor for Fohhn in the US. Following their success during InfoComm 2022 and 2023, Fohhn opened a subsidiary in Miami and signed up Stirling to help them with products sourcing/logistics and US based customers. Fohhn's has been the leader in Beam steering technology since 2009, their speakers can be found in some of the biggest venues all over Europe. They are now ready and eager to bring their expertise to the American market.

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TD SYNEX

TD SYNEX announces the addition of Santiago (Santi) Larrain to our ProAV and Physical Security sales team. Santi brings 10 years of sales experience within the IT and physical security space. Santi will be responsible for growing the TD SYNEX presence within the Physical Security market.

Contact santi.larrain@tdsynnex.com to learn more.

Jon Baker, CTS, has been promoted to supervisor for the Field Services Engineering group at TD SYNEX. Jon will lead our team of presales engineers for the ProAV, Physical Security and collaboration ecosystems.

To learn more about TD SYNEX and our VisualSolv services and expertise, contact VisualSolv@tdsynnex.com today.

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Explore the IDC InfoBrief, and unearth the pressures and challenges facing organizations in a new age of hybrid and multisite working. It deep-dives into the complexities of the approach to modern office work, highlighting the role of audio and visual equipment in delivering both business outcomes and employee experience. IDC concludes with some key recommendations and actions for all organizations facing these issues, along with a clear set of best practice guidelines.

Read more about the hidden influencer and how rethinking audio could impact your organization today, tomorrow, and forever.

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Contact NSCA Senior Marketing & Channel Manager Max Johnson at mjohnson@nsca.org or 319.861.8629.



Loyd Ivey:

A Legacy Statement from AtlasIED

It is with deep sadness and profound gratitude that the Ivey and MiTek family announce the passing of Loyd Ivey. We mourn the passing of a visionary leader who impacted the landscape of the commercial audio industry.

Loyd's remarkable journey began five decades ago, and his relentless pursuit of excellence elevated MiTek Corporation, and its companies, to the pinnacle of success. His dedication and innovation not only earned him numerous accolades, including the prestigious NSCA Education Foundation Founders Award, as well as the NSCA Per Haugen Lifetime Achievement Award (the only member to receive both awards), but also earned enduring respect and admiration.

Loyd's impact reached far beyond awards and recognition. An entrepreneur through and through, he built his businesses both organically and through strategic acquisition. Many of the acquired brands were consolidated into and added to the success of the well-known commercial and consumer audio brands—AtlasIED and MTX, the two largest entities that fall under the MiTek umbrella.

In addition to his entrepreneurial passion, Loyd's commitment to nurturing talent and fostering a culture of growth within and outside the companies transformed the lives and careers of countless employees and industry individuals. His mentorship inspired innovation and creativity, yielding confident pioneers in this ever-evolving industry.

Johnathan Ivey, president of MiTek Corporation and Loyd's son, said of his father, "Innovation was at the heart of Loyd's legacy. He pushed boundaries, leading MiTek, AtlasIED, and MTX to develop groundbreaking products and solutions that set industry standards. Although Loyd was from humble beginnings, his passion for pushing the envelope and delivering unparalleled quality has been the cornerstone of our business and family success."

When asked to contribute to Loyd's legacy statement, some of the industry's well-respected veterans provided insight into Loyd's impact on their professional lives:

"Pat and I first met Loyd in the late '90s, not long after we purchased SynAudCon from Don and Carolyn Davis. Those first few years were as tough, as they are with any new business. I personally was a little discouraged. Loyd sat down with me at a tradeshow and helped me see how important SynAudCon is to the audio industry. For a man of his reputation and pedigree to share his wisdom with me meant a lot. I knew the value in his words, and I took them seriously.

"Throughout the years, we stayed friends. We were always eager to catch up with him at the tradeshows. He was quite the visionary, with great business chops. As his illness progressed, and he suffered from physical limitations, he continued to carry out his visions by partnering with other companies. He obviously had an amazing ability to put his mind over his physical symptoms.

"I would describe Loyd as a 'determined fighter' who had a way of bringing the best out of everyone around him. He was quite the inspiration to Pat and I, and I would venture to say he inspired most everyone around him."

— Brenda Brown, SynAudCon

"Loyd was a HUGE personal inspirational character in my life. Even after I sold the business, we would chat every year at CES when I was attending."

— Gordon Dutch, Re-Sauce

"Loyd Ivey and Hardy Martin (founder of IED) were special people and, when they were together in the same room, they were quite a pair. They both loved to discuss AV, their airplanes, and, most of all, their children. Loyd was a good friend and always ready to help our industry."

— Jim Ford, Ford AV

"I joined the MiTek corporation in 1999 when the company acquired Atlas/Soundolier. Loyd immediately placed emphasis on filling our warehouse with abundant inventory of every product we manufactured and investing millions of dollars in new automation and upgraded factory infrastructure. He rebranded the company Atlas Sound (now AtlasIED) to show the industry that there was a new attitude at work with a goal to reestablish customer confidence.

Loyd would say, 'Treat the company like it was yours and make decisions like you're the owner.' Looking at this now, and how AtlasIED has advanced with multiple award-winning products and technologies, he clearly had the right people and execution to achieve that goal. His original vision continues to drive AtlasIED today and into the future.

"From a personal perspective, Loyd made it a point to know all MiTek employees personally (he referred to as partners). He took direct interest in us, including me, my family, and personal interest in my career trajectory, embracing my talents and allowing them to be channeled where they were best used. Through the years, I have been fortunate to get to know Loyd and the Ivey family on a personal level and am proud to be a part of such an overwhelming legacy."

— Steve Alban, Mitek

"My relationship with Loyd started 15-20 years ago, and our connection was immediate, as there was a personal tie between Mary's family situation and Loyd's health symptoms. We felt drawn to his energy and passion, and his professionalism. Initially, the relationship took root when Loyd sold me a live events company in Milwaukee (which we still own today.) Loyd was fair, he took the time to help me create a transition plan that ensured the forthcoming success of that acquisition. Since then, our professional relationship deepened as we became friendly with John and Beth after John stepped into a leadership role in the company. So much of our professional growth has been milestones we talked about together; and, even more importantly, we shared our experiences to help each other grow. Those types of relationships are rare, and my only regret is not having met Loyd and the Ivey family sooner in my career. He will be missed."

— John Laughlin, CTI

"Loyd was a real character. I'd find myself talking with him for hours about old cars, horses, military strategy, business opportunities, and all sorts of things. I can't recall a single conversation with Loyd where we stayed on topic. I remember it like it was yesterday that, during my first week at NSCA, I had a four-hour encounter (on a train, no less) with Loyd regarding the state of our industry. That helped me understand what was in store for me going forward.

"Loyd was a tough guy to get to know but, once you did, he was far kinder and more caring than what people realize. His generosity helped pave the way for just about every new program we launched at NSCA. Loyd had a real knack for proving me wrong. I think we challenged each other in that way. I'd tell him not to do something and, of course, he did and, in most every situation, he was right. That motivated him in ways that I'm not sure just financial reward would have."

— Chuck Wilson, NSCA

Loyd's passion remains embedded in our company's DNA. As we mourn his loss, we also find strength in his enduring legacy, as his son, Johnathan Ivey, leads the company forward, ensuring that the spark of innovation and dedication Loyd ignited continues to light our path.

NSCA's BLC: Business Intelligence Meets Community Camaraderie

Each year, NSCA's Business & Leadership Conference brings together seasoned executives and aspiring young leaders to empower integrators to run their businesses better. *By Dan Ferrisi*



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A perennial BLC speaker, Dr. Chris Kuehl, a managing director of Armada Corporate Intelligence, offers up-to-the-minute updates on considerations like interest rates, oil prices, inflation, the job market, and geopolitical conflicts. Never one to rehash the “conventional wisdom,” Dr. Kuehl often surprises attendees with contrarian assessments of things like recession risk—but he always shares plenty of data to back up his arguments. If you're sick of hyper-partisan, cable-news talking heads and just want the skinny on how economic and political factors will affect your business, then Dr. Kuehl's BLC presentations are can't-miss.

The other element of BLC that I, as a journalist and industry observer, really appreciate is the robust networking that occurs throughout the three-day event. Of course, every business owner wants their own business to be hyper-successful, so competition will always be a factor. However, I believe that the AV industry is unique in its tight-knittedness.

When integration business owners descend on BLC each winter, they're there to boost their own business, yes, but also to enhance and refine the craft and trade of AV integration. Everyone visiting that resort is deeply committed to delivering exceptional outcomes for clients and facilitating unforgettable AV experiences. A spirit of collaboration, cooperation and unity prevails throughout BLC. It's an event at which we root for—and support—each other as we stand together as one industry.

It's a terrific time to be an integrator, insofar as society's appetite for experiential AV has never been greater. But economic turbulence and day-to-day stressors mean that an integration business owner's life isn't always easy.

As a journalist and industry observer, I find that, quite often, integrators are so busy working *in* their business that they rarely have time to work *on* their business. Yet, business-enhancement strategies and entrepreneurial best practices are exactly what integration company leaders should rely on to smooth economic peaks and troughs and withstand exogenous events like the pandemic and supply-chain snarls.

That's why I encourage integration business owners to invest the time and financial resources to attend NSCA's Business & Leadership Conference (BLC) each winter.

BLC—the next edition is scheduled for Feb. 27-29, 2024, in Irving, TX—is a premier thought-leadership conference and business-enhancement retreat. Each year, a few-hundred executive-level integration business leaders come together at a beautiful resort and golf club to commiserate about ongoing challenges and strategize about ways to overcome them.

Central to that strategizing is a robust content program populated by accomplished speakers who exhort and equip BLC attendees to be better leaders, more effective managers, and more profitable businesspeople. The sessions aren't about products and technologies; most of the speakers don't specifically invoke AV at all. The presentations are about the foundational pillars of business success ... about the building blocks of working on your business.

But make no mistake: The content program isn't only about motivation and self-improvement; it's also about equipping today's integration business leaders with the economic intelligence they need to make wise choices.

That communal, giving spirit is one reason why it's so important not only for seasoned integration professionals, but also up-and-coming superstars to attend BLC. That's why NSCA created the Randy Vaughan Leadership Award. Its purpose is to mobilize the next generation of AV business leaders. Award winners attend BLC free of charge and get an opportunity to rub elbows with mentors and sources of inspiration.

Past Randy Vaughan Leadership Award recipients include a who's who of *Commercial Integrator* 40 Under 40 alumni, including Brittany DiCesare of Control Concepts, Xzavia Killikelly of Bose Professional, and Katelyn Kazanowski of PTG. Many of us wring our hands about not having a clear, mindful strategy for nurturing the next generation of AV leaders. With the Randy Vaughan Leadership Award, NSCA translates its words to action.

That's not even to mention the Excellence in Product Innovation Awards, whose winners are crowned each year at BLC. The awards program, which focuses not purely on innovative technology but, more importantly, on how manufacturers and products affect integration businesses, are always a highlight on the opening evening.

That same evening is also a chance to hear from distinguished guests—for example, industry icon Cory Schaeffer, who accepted the 2023 NSCA Education Foundation Founders Award last year. Being in the room truly puts you in distinguished company. It's where you want to be.

It's not too late to register to attend this year's BLC, which will emanate from the beautiful Las Colinas Resort. Visit [NSCA.org/blc](https://www.nasca.org/blc) for more information.

And if you *do* attend this year's BLC, look out for me and say hi! Part of being a good technology journalist is gathering perspectives from a range of industry stakeholders, and I'd like to get to know you.

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10 Cost-Saving Ideas to Start Right Now

Start the new year off on a positive—and profitable—note. by Chuck Wilson

As I do every year at about this time, I've been thinking about the lessons NSCA members learned in the past 12 months and am sharing that advice here to help you get ready for what's to come.

Here are 10 cost-saving tips to implement now to get 2024 started off right.

1. Conduct reviews of benefits programs and insurance

This includes workers' comp rates, vehicles that haven't moved (do you need them?), 401(k) matching and fee reductions, business interruption insurance that never pays claims, etc. Combine policies and riders, reevaluate coverage, look for savings, and align costs with current headcount.

2. Analyze staff alignment

Integrators often think of "fully utilized people" as synonymous with no staffing problems, but that's not true. Just because someone is "fully utilized" doesn't mean they're being used to their full potential. They could be spending time on non-productive or unnecessary tasks. This may even lead to non-essential overtime costs. For example, you may discover that someone is spending time simply supervising processes that no longer need supervision because they've become routine.

3. Turn expenses into savings

Identify areas where additional expenses can become cost-savings measures. IT is a great place to start. What *really* requires backup to a Tier 3 data center vs. traditional cloud storage? Do you have active software licenses for programs that are no longer being used? Are all company phones and hot spots still active and being used?

4. Fix bad spending habits

This is where "ownership thinking" comes into play. Incentives can be used to drive unnecessary spending out of the company for good. For example, use your vehicle-tracking software to make sure company-owned vehicles remain parked on the weekends (unless, of course, someone is working approved overtime).

5. Plan for scalability

The best cost-reduction strategies allow you to scale based on how your business looks now and in the future. For example, the transition to electronic invoicing now is a cost-saving idea today that will also enable new opportunities for you and your customers in the future, including managing billing dates on progress payments, speeding up cashflow, etc.

6. Streamline excess inventory

Now's the time to get rid of the equipment you'll never use! Keeping it only takes up valuable space and wastes time for those who have to manage and move it. Ask one of your underutilized staff members to wrangle this equipment and determine what to do with it: sell it, donate it to students who want to get their hands on some real AV technology, etc. One NSCA member has tasked its receptionist with finding ways to turn inventory into cash.

7. Combine functions and events

If time is absolutely at a premium for most of your staff members, then consider combining company functions and events temporarily. For example, instead of holding two in-person or virtual meetings on different dates—one for a company huddle and one to celebrate company milestones—combine the two.

8. Control operating expenses

This includes workers' comp rates, vehicles that haven't moved (do you need them?), 401(k) matching and fee reductions, business interruption insurance that never pays claims, etc. Combine policies and riders, reevaluate coverage, look for savings, and align costs with current headcount.

9. Reduce banking and credit card fees

Rates for PPP loans are far less than your line of credit: Make sure your bank adjusted for this. Evaluate credit card usage policies and the rates you pay for their use. Prepay invoices where you can to lower your costs and even take advantage of early-payment discounts.

10. Lower legal and professional fees

Rather than paying an attorney for specific documents, for example, you may have access to templates you can use in the [Essentials Online Library](#).

For more tips like these, download NSCA's Financial Leadership 101 document, which includes 24 important financial metrics that integrators should consider monitoring in 2024.

But most important of all: Get ready for a successful 2024!

Chuck Wilson is CEO at NSCA.



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