

➔ Challenge

Provide an enticing space for relaxation, team-building, and informal meetings at a social networking company's world headquarters.

➔ Solution

An advanced video entertainment and video conferencing system based on Crestron technology.



Logging On



We have over 2,000 employees in this building, and the Lodge provides a central meeting place for them. Instead of standing around their cubicles, they can come here and have a coffee or a beer.”

— **Alex Stillings**
IT Manager, Twitter

Twitter® adds a rustic, yet high-tech employee lounge to its San Francisco headquarters

What do Twitter employees do when they need to unwind?

One good option is to step into The Lodge in the company's headquarters, which is set up like a rustic coffee shop or sports bar, with two century-old log cabins adding to its unique charm.

Each cabin gives frazzled engineers and programmers a space to take a break, eat a meal, or get a fresh perspective by working in a different environment. Booths and cafe tables outside the cabins provide semi-private spaces to hold a workgroup meeting, and a video conferencing system can extend those meetings to team members in any of Twitter's 30+ offices worldwide. Still, the theme is relaxation, not work, connection, not production. For that reason, the front section of the room includes a nine-screen video wall normally showing live TV sports, and each cabin includes four L-shaped couches in the corners, facing four flat-panel TVs mounted on a pillar at its center.

These are first-class entertainment and casual meeting spaces, tied together with an advanced audio and video system powered by Crestron DigitalMedia™, and operated with Crestron control technology.



Working hard and playing hard

Like other California-based technology firms, Twitter is known as a place where hard work and good fun can go hand-in-hand. Yet in offering a platform that brings so many people together, the company is especially cognizant of the need to build personal connections within its own staff. Thus, in addition to the Lodge, the firm's social spaces include a cafeteria, game room, and a rooftop patio furnished with sofas, lounge chairs, and even a lawn with games. There's a bright, welcoming theme to the headquarters, combining a natural vibe with high technology.

Twitter moved into the 1937 Art Deco building on Market Street in San Francisco about three years ago. The location offers two major attractions: the chance for staff to live in the city without having to commute an hour or more into Silicon Valley, and an opportunity for growth by periodically remodeling more floors.

Originally the firm occupied only the seventh, eighth, and ninth floors, but soon expanded into the tenth and eleventh. Last June they moved into the fifth and sixth floors, and opened the 8,000 square-foot Lodge. The cabins included in the space had been built by settlers in Montana, but dismantled and relocated here.

In addition to the cabins, the Lodge has a cafe area with round tables positioned near the video wall, a coffee bar with its own 80" Sharp® TV, a stairway up to a sixth-floor kitchen, and back area with 12 semi-private booths.

"As a manager, I've held one-on-one meetings with



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direct reports here," says Alex Stillings, IT Manager, who is in charge of the design and installation of audio and video systems for the firm. "I've also seen groups get together for someone's birthday, bond with a new team member, or celebrate when they finish a project."

"We have over 2,000 employees in this building, and the Lodge provides a central meeting place for them. Instead of standing around their cubicles, they can come here and have a coffee or a beer." Even if a team is dispersed geographically, they can use the video conferencing system to chat and have a drink—perhaps not physically together, but sharing the same kind of camaraderie.



The space is especially useful because Twitter is intimately involved with sporting events around the world, serving as a platform for players, fans, and commentators to share news and ideas. This is a place where Twitter employees can experience the excitement of the games their clients tweet about.

Designing the AV systems

Andrew Jones, Program Manager at Sunnyvale-based AV integrator Thresher Communications, agrees that the Lodge is “a very special, very cool space.”

Thresher has been working with Twitter for almost three years and has created the AV design standards used in all of its offices worldwide, which include extensive use of Crestron technology. They also provide installation labor for the headquarters and other domestic facilities.

“We tried to design systems that would serve the very interesting and eclectic nooks that the Lodge consists of,” Jones explains. “We’re leveraging the technology to provide an entertaining atmosphere and help make communications more fun.” An important part of that effort was the use of a Crestron DigitalMedia™ network to keep video and audio quality at its highest, and Crestron control to keep operations simple.

The focus of the video systems is the video wall. Thresher VP of Engineering David Haynes used nine Planar® 46" displays mounted in a three-by-three array. Most often the video wall carries a single, 5.5' x 10' image, but each of its displays can show a separate channel. Haynes also included a preset on the Crestron touch screen for a six-image display, with four screens

carrying a single program and the remaining screens five more. “I’m really looking forward to using the multi-screen setup for March Madness this year,” Stillings says.

The video conferencing system includes a high definition codec with two pan/tilt/zoom cameras, one mounted on a pull-out shelf next to the video wall to capture local meeting participants, and one mounted opposite the video wall to capture presenters. Staff can use the video wall to view up to nine images, including one or two laptops screens, a near-end preview and multiple far-end sites.

The video wall and the other TVs are fed by a DM® 32X32 switcher, which allows users to send any source to any combination of displays.

Sources include 18 DIRECTV® receivers, the video conferencing system, and two Crestron wall plates with inputs for digital and analog laptops. Stillings expects to connect the switcher to a larger DigitalMedia network as the company grows, allowing the Lodge to serve as an overflow space for company-wide all-hands meetings originating on the ninth floor.

The Lodge also includes a superb sound system, divided into three zones, with QSC® amplifiers sending music, TV audio, and/or sound from two wireless mic systems to 30 Tannoy® ceiling speakers. The TVs in the cabins and coffee bar most often stay muted with closed captioning displayed.

“Our main design goal was to keep everything simple,” Stillings says, and so Haynes and the Thresher team



installed a 10" Crestron touch screen on a credenza near the video wall. "Users can simply grab a source from a list on the touch screen, and drag it to an image of the display or audio zone they want." Thresher also created a password-protected technician's screen, providing in-depth control of all of the systems.

In the cabins, Thresher mounted a 7" Crestron touch screen below each of the TVs. It has just two screens: one with the eight most popular DIRECTV channels and the other allowing users to key in any channel. "The touch screens are a little more expensive than DIRECTV remotes," Stillings says, "but they are well worth it. They're a lot easier to use, they look better, and they don't get misplaced like a handheld remote."

Stillings and his staff can also access any of the control screens from anywhere with an Internet connection, if, for example, someone needs help to set up the video wall or route meeting audio to the right zone remotely. "I have the Crestron mobile app installed on my phone, but I normally use my laptop, since I always have it with me."

Stillings says it was the Thresher team who introduced him to DigitalMedia almost three years ago. "The cool thing was that we could have multiple inputs with HDMI® and VGA plus analog audio, all on a solid transport layer that could run for hundreds of feet. For video conferencing, we started using Crestron touch screens and a DM matrix for routing. Crestron gives us a really nice interface that can control the whole room, including lighting and shading. For our simpler rooms we use 'auto on' and 'off' that we leverage through the

Crestron system. I can just come in, plug in my laptop and everything I need turns on. We don't need a remote or a panel at all."

"Thresher, too, has been a great vendor. When you're going through the hyper-growth that Twitter has, you need to build solid design standards, and they've provided them. It reduces my workload.

"All of this has worked so well that we really haven't explored other solutions. There's just no need to look elsewhere."

The Lodge, too, has proven a solid addition to Twitter headquarters. Open all day, it's not unusual for employees to meet there after hours for a drink or to watch a game. "I don't come in on Sundays," Stillings adds, "but I wouldn't be surprised to find a group there watching football."

"Our people like it so much that, during a big event like the World Cup, it's standing room only."

Integrator
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