What's the Big Fuzz about Digital Signage for Room Booking?

As a professional AV integrator, you should have heard about the emerging demands around placing small displays outside of meeting rooms, especially if you service large organizations. Are there real benefits for having these shinny objects in the workspace? What value propositions would get your clients interested in exploring this technology with you?

Why Screens Outside of Meeting Rooms?

Digital signage has been placed outside of meeting rooms and ballrooms for many years. These screens were first deployed at conference centers where events happening inside the rooms change almost daily. Digital signage provides a great tool for informing attendees about events happening behind the closed doors. It is much more environmentally friendly and accurate than printing paper signs. For the same reason, large enterprises are bringing room booking panels into their workplace to manage their most valuable meeting spaces.


IAdea
22" Smart
Room Display
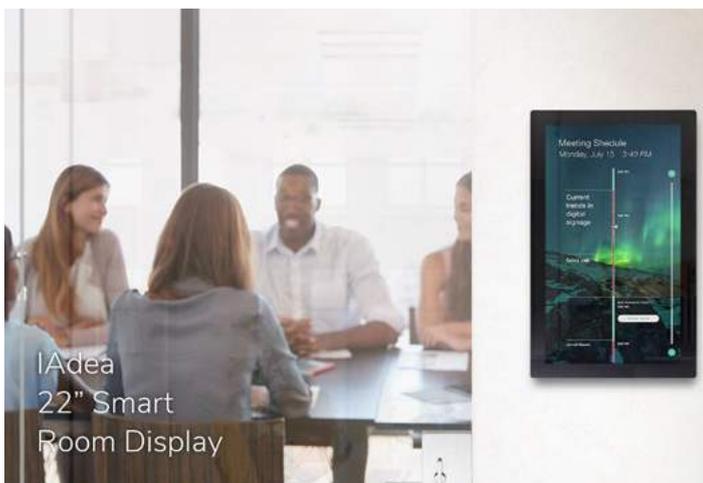
Think of the life without screens outside of meeting rooms. I can never forget the experience when I pushed open a pair of closed doors only to find a room with dozens of gazes locked on me, and realized I was not in the right room for my scheduled meeting. Or when I took my visitors to grab an empty room to sit down (my booked room was taken by another group because of a schedule conflict), only to find that half way into the meeting, another group came in to claim that they had booked the room for the next hour. These experiences are not only disturbances to the work routine, making VIP guests wonder if the organization is just as unorganized in other aspects of their profession. They are also a costly source of inefficiency at work. One study estimates that inefficient meetings cost $37 billion annually in the U.S. alone.

What can the Little Screen Do?

A small screen can fulfill the job of providing key information about the event happening behind closed doors, and a list of upcoming events for the day. This alone can already help avoid the embarrassment I experienced earlier. The meetings schedule also helps employees identify how much time the room will remain vacant before the next event starts.

IAdea
10" Advanced
Room Booking Panel
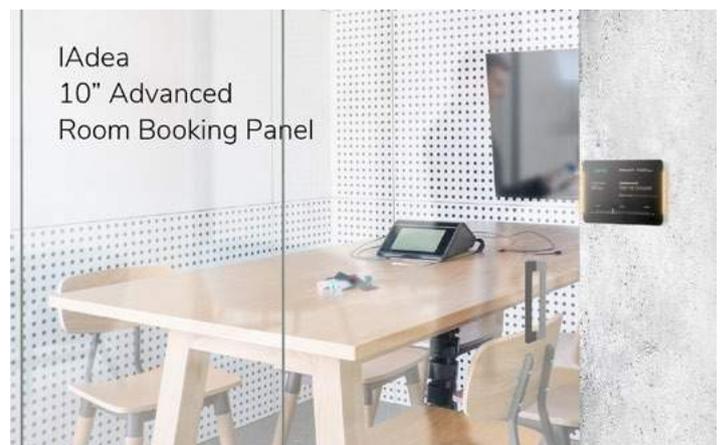
Furthermore, specially designed room booking panels provide bright colored lights on the sides of the screen, to extend the visible distance of room availability information. A green glow would indicate that the room is vacant, and red that the room is in session. Other uses of the light may indicate that a meeting is about to start (so don't take this room if the conversation will be longer than a few minutes),

or that the room is waiting to be sanitized by the cleaning crew (especially at this time of the COVID scare) before it is safe for used again.

If the screen is touch-sensitive, it can allow users to book the room right on the spot at the touch of a button. The reservation would be linked with the organization's master meeting schedule, so others know that the particular room is blocked out for the duration of the meeting.

Nowadays people may want to avoid touching screens in the public, to reduce the risk of contracting illness, so some room booking panels provide alternatives to touch for booking the room. Users may connect with the room by scanning an on-screen QR code with her personal mobile phone, or via Bluetooth beacon technology. The room can just as easily be booked on-the-spot from the safety and convenience of her personal device.


IAdea
15" Room
Management Panel
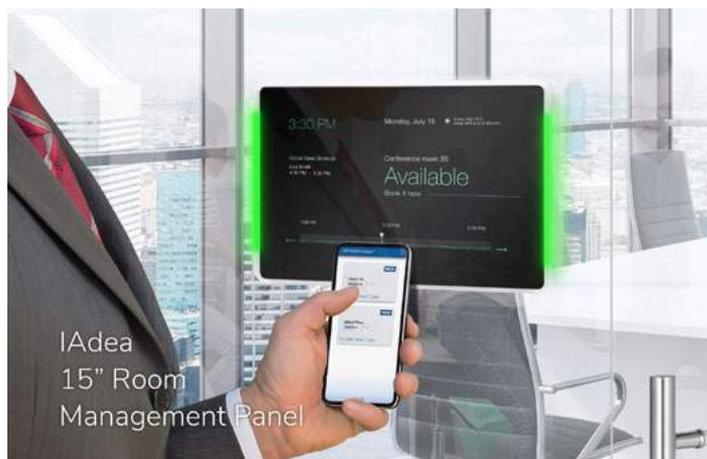
Variety of Offerings

As an integrator, you have a choice of technologies for implementing room booking panels.

Many users would start with a consumer tablet, such as the iPad or a generic Android device, to test out the concept. Beware though that several complications with the consumer devices may cause an unpleasant project experience. Mounting a consumer device securely on a wall is harder than it seems. You will need a theft-proof mounting kit that may cost as much as the device itself. If you opt for using the Wi-Fi connection, you may be in for a bad

surprise, as a lost of connectivity can result in bad user experience and an expensive field visit. Getting power to the device is also a challenge. The worst nightmare of all, and this is often only learned months after deployment, is that there may be a percentage of swollen batteries due to repeated battery charging. Simply put, the consumer tablet was not properly designed for the task.

IAdea
10" Advanced
Room Booking Panel

For a properly designed room panel device, you need to look for the following: Power-over-Ethernet for uninterrupted supply of electricity and connectivity; manufacturer-certified mounts for dry wall and glass installations; and proven track record of large scale deployment. The last point is probably your guarantee to success, especially if the device has been approved by the IT department of large, global end users. Throughout the project lifecycle, the IT team will inevitably step in and scrutinize every aspect of the device regarding data security. This is a whole other topic of discussion. The shortcut is to find a vendor that has been there and done it at scale for the most demanding clients.

How to Get Started?

You should speak with your corporate, education, and government clients to find out if they are already evaluating to deploy room booking panels. Chances are they already are, and you do not want to be late in the game. Next you will need to find a hardware and a software vendor. Ask for their reference projects. If they are experienced with globally leading end users, then you should be in good hands.