The New Crestron: Enterprise and UC Platforms for the Modern Workplace

A new company that's been 40 years in the making

By: Blair Pleasant

President & Principal Analyst, COMMfusion
and Co-Founder, BCStrategies

BCSTRATEGIES
A BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCE

Executive Summary

From its beginnings as an AV company, Crestron has evolved into a Smart Space IoT company providing enhanced experiences for both commercial and residential customers. While offering solutions for all the places people live, learn, work and play, the core of Crestron's business is the workplace. To underscore that focus the company is making large investments in the space. Crestron is bringing forward decades of expertise in control and automation to digitally transform workspaces in order to empower IT professionals in the areas of Unified Communications (UC), scheduling, digital signage, and wireless presentation.

Organizations across a variety of vertical markets are utilizing Crestron's hardware and software expertise, digital tools, Internet of Things (IoT) approach, and solutions to drive efficiency and create more satisfying and effective collaboration experiences.

Our analysis shows that:

Crestron leaned into the future of the industry, sometime dragging the AV industry along kicking and screaming ... evolving with customers' needs has always been part of Crestron's job. **[Page 2]**

Today's Crestron is an end user and customer-centric company with an incredibly broad portfolio that helps automate and simplify the way IT professionals and their constituents work. **[Page 3]**

Crestron takes a standards-based approach to make it easier for IT managers to implement its solutions, with no custom programming or expensive set-up. Research and development activities are now centered around making Crestron's products simpler to deploy. **[Page 4]**

The Flex platform provides a full range of solutions for any size meeting space, including a range of form factors ... this ability to create hybrid collaboration spaces that allow for connectivity regardless of platform is even more important in today's world. **[Page 5]**

Crestron's AirMedia solution provides a wireless sharing capability that works with an organization's existing network. **[Page 6]**

While many companies focus on the in-room technology, finding the room is just as important. **[Page 6]**

Crestron immediately knows when there's a problem with a device and can resolve the issue remotely, without the need for extra configuration tools. **[Page 7]**

As a wholly-integrated hardware and software company, Crestron is a fully vertical manufacturer with production facilities around the world used to manufacture a majority of its products. **[Page 8]**

Crestron has focused its efforts on making its products more easily purchased, deployed, and installed without requiring custom programming and development. **[Page 8]**

A Look Back Reveals Steady Movement Forward

Founded in 1972, Crestron has a rich heritage of developing and producing products that solve needs in the workplace and the home. Historically, the company created a broad set of piece-part devices and sensors that consultants, dealers, and architects put together to create a solution, but that's been changing.

With the advent of the Internet and digital protocols, **Crestron leaned into the future of the industry, sometimes dragging the AV industry along kicking and screaming.** In 1995, the company introduced the first networked device in the industry, and a few years later introduced E-Control, which provided new ways of integrating and controlling custom spaces. This was the first step in a long journey to merge the AV and IT worlds. In 2001, the company launched the industry's first server-based management system, built for Microsoft®, connecting devices to Exchange to make them "scheduling aware." Now, with the ability to network, control, and monitor devices, Crestron was ready to fully jump from the analog world (preferred by traditional AV pros) to the digital realm. To that end, Crestron introduced DigitalMedia™ in 2009 – the industry's first fully-digital audio and video distribution system.

As "digital transformation" became the rallying cry in 2014, the company reached an inflection point – everything changed from how the company designs, develops, and delivers products, to engaging with customers. Crestron's digital transformation was a conscious decision to focus on the IT professional ecosystem, including system integrators and resellers to sell and install its products, while leveraging Microsoft Azure® IoT for provisioning and management.

The Crestron of today might be unrecognizable from the company that began over five decades ago. While the company employs new technologies such as IoT and AI to provide smart buildings, smart classrooms, and smart workspaces, **evolving with customers' needs has always been part of Crestron's job.**

1972
Crestron founded

1986
Crestron Lighting Systems

1993
Color video and computer graphics touch screen

1997
Ethernet to RS-232 Internet-based Control System

1999
E-Control

2001
Server-based Management

2004
Room Scheduling Panel

2007
Energy Management

2009

CRESTRON DIGITALMEDIA™

2015
Cloud-based Management

2018
Microsoft Partner
2018 Partner of the Year
Internet of Things

Crestron Re-Imagined

If you think of Crestron as simply a manufacturer of audio and video equipment—think again. **Today's Crestron is an end user and customer-centric company with an incredibly broad portfolio that helps automate and simplify the way IT professionals and their constituents work.**

Based on its experience and expertise designing and developing complete hardware and software automation solutions, Crestron is now focused on applying its core principle of automation to where people live (Crestron Home, Marine), learn (Education Solutions), work (Corporate, Enterprise and Government Solutions) and play (Hospitality).

While over the last 40 years it has been known for video, audio, lighting and more, one area where Crestron has more recently made a name for itself is in "Workspace Solutions," including unified communications, meeting solutions, collaboration tools, presentation solutions, and more.

The Crestron Portfolio

Residential: Crestron Home & Marine

Higher Learning: Education Solutions

Workplace: Corporate & Enterprise

Government: Military & Civilian Solutions

Entertainment: Hospitality Solutions

Crestron Re-Imagined

Simplicity is the New Mantra

According to Crestron, simplicity is key, and starts with the types of systems the company designs. Recognizing that customers want solutions that are simpler to deploy and manage, and the market no longer wants as many one-off, customized solutions that require a disparate selection of pieces and elements to make everything integrate, Crestron designs its solutions from the start with end users in mind.

Crestron believes that consistency is key to simplicity. Every workplace solution has to deliver a consistent experience for everyone from the IT manager to C-suite executive, whether they're working on site or remotely. **Crestron takes a standards-based approach to make it easier for IT managers to implement its solutions, with no custom programming or expensive set-up.**

Research and development activities are now centered around making Crestron's products simpler to deploy and configure, without the need for any programming. Crestron has added a number of packaged and all-in-one workspace solutions for a variety of markets that are ready to use out of the box, including eight packaged solutions for classrooms, making it easier for organizations to purchase and deploy complete workspace solutions.

Ultimately, it's all about scale.

All-in-one workspace solutions

Consistent experience from IT to C-Suite

No programming

Simple deployment and configuration

A Quick Look at the Flex Lineup

Crestron's Flex family delivers a familiar, consistent experience across all the spaces people work. **The Flex platform provides a full range of solutions for any size meeting space, including a range of form factors:**

- B-Series Soundbars for small rooms

- M-Series Tabletop Devices for medium and large rooms

- R-Series Rapid Deployment mobile UC solutions allow for quick and easy rollout of conferencing to any space in the workplace or shop floor.

- C-Series Kit allows a customer to take a custom space (boardroom, experience center, etc.) and hide all the complexity behind the standard Teams interface. When used along with Logitech peripherals, the C-Series Kit provides more audio and video options while driving a single management and user experience.

Crestron now makes a complete lineup of certified Microsoft Teams® rooms with out-of-the-box functionality. The latest product, the new Crestron Flex MX, is aimed at organizations that have standardized on Microsoft Teams. Providing a native one-touch experience, it enables any guest (consultant, customer, client, or vendor) to connect and present on any platform by connecting their laptop to the Crestron Flex MX. **This ability to create hybrid collaboration spaces that allow for connectivity regardless of platform is even more important in today's world,** with more employees working remotely or within the boundaries of social distancing.

The Crestron Flex M-Series

The Crestron Flex M-Series offers one-touch control of smart building ecosystems, reducing the number of touch points in any meeting space. In addition to the requisite camera, microphone, and touch panel, IT professionals can add and install other elements for the meeting room, such as Crestron's shading, lighting, environment controls, automation, scheduling, audio, and so on, without requiring custom programming. For example, using automated sensors and tunable lighting that can be set up based on circadian rhythms and the actual light outside, Crestron can create an environment that helps support both worker heath and productivity.

Beyond Videoconferencing: Collaboration Platforms

Workplace technology doesn't begin and end with videoconferencing. With only 10-20 percent of conference rooms actually equipped with videoconferencing equipment, employees need more options. Crestron has developed a couple of key technologies that complement the way employees and organizations work today:

Wireless, Wired and touchless Content Sharing: **Crestron's AirMedia solution provides a wireless sharing capability that works with an organizations' existing network.** Employees and guests can connect to a display from any personal device via existing wireless access points. The AirMedia presentation system supports any OS on any device for efficient content sharing in both UC and non-UC spaces. This technology can also connect to the Flex platform, ensuring every room works the same regardless of remote participants.

Room Scheduling: **While many companies focus on the in-room technology, finding the room is just as important.** With meeting information and a high-visibility indicator, employees can quickly find spaces to meet or book on the fly. The system directly connects to Office 365® and G-Suite®, as well as more than 20 third-party providers.

With AirMedia, employees and guests can connect to a display from any personal device via existing wireless access points.

Employees can quickly find spaces to meet or book on the fly.

Insights to Improve Efficiency

Stitching all these products together is the Crestron XiO Cloud™. Built on the Microsoft Azure® platform, the Crestron XiO Cloud IoT-based provisioning and management solution simplifies deployment, management, and monitoring. The Crestron XiO Cloud platform provisions, configures, and manages devices remotely across an enterprise or an entire client base to improve device uptime. The dashboard offers live views of millions of devices from anywhere at any time, so **Crestron immediately knows when there's a problem with a device and can resolve the issue remotely, without the need for extra configuration tools.**

Using the Crestron XiO Cloud centralized interactive dashboards, organizations have a real-time view into how spaces and technology are actually used. Leveraging this usage data, organizations can optimize their resources, spaces, and technology to improve efficiency. For example, organizations can view the status of their Microsoft Teams Rooms, room occupancy, etc., to see how their spaces and technology are actually used and identify opportunities for improvement. Some customers may find the data more valuable than the room devices.

With Crestron XiO Cloud and direct device-to-cloud integration with Crestron's global manufacturing and logistics network, devices can be configured before they are even received. For example, when a Microsoft Teams Room system is shipped, customers simply open the box, plug in the hardware, associate it with their Microsoft Teams account, and it's up and running in minutes for a plug and play experience - with no coding required. Crestron's cloud platform also enables the monitoring, management and data analytic gathering, of third-party devices such as Logitech.

Leveraging this usage data, organizations can optimize their resources, spaces, and technology to improve efficiency.

Rethinking Crestron

If you think of Crestron, as a hardware-centric AV company with high-end solutions for mansions and board rooms, think again. **As a wholly-integrated hardware and software company, Crestron is a fully-vertical manufacturer with production facilities around the world used to manufacture a majority of its products.** In addition, the company has a proprietary research and development center with 99 local offices to provide customer support.

While Crestron may not have the brand recognition of some of the key UC vendors, the company has been providing video conferencing, meeting room solutions, collaboration tools, room scheduling, wireless presentation systems, and more, to help organizations better communicate and collaborate. Twenty years ago, it was one of the first companies to partner with Microsoft. As a key Microsoft Teams technology partner, Crestron's hardware and software add value to Teams deployments and enhance the Teams experience by helping employees find spaces and share content, while enabling organizations to maximize uptime with IoT management tools.

Crestron has focused its efforts on making its products more easily purchased, deployed, and installed without requiring custom programming and development. At the same time, the company is providing solutions aimed at IT professionals, resellers, and system integrators. Now, the same people that sell, deploy, and service Microsoft Teams and other IT products also provide Crestron's products. With preconfigured solutions for various vertical markets, Crestron and its partners can deliver solutions that are faster and simpler to deploy and install.

If you thought you knew Crestron, it's time to take another look.