

Boundary-Pushing A/V for Chicago Ideas Week



March 2014 -- Chicago Ideas Week is a movement built on one core belief: “When a wide spectrum of thinkers and instigators share ideas, they have the power to transform the world.” The annual Windy City event is inventive, boundary-pushing, entrepreneurial and collaborative. The seven-day event forms a coalescing force that alters perspectives, stretches academic curiosity and forces individuals to reimagine the structures and beliefs that shape their communities.



Carrie Kennedy

Is it any wonder that Carrie Kennedy, the festival’s Executive Producer, chose Creative Technology (CT) to provide A/V equipment, services and support for two of the event’s venues? Having worked with CT in the past, she knew that CT’s vision, staff, products and services would be just as inventive, mind-bending and boundary-pushing as her events.

Chicago Ideas Week is the largest ideas festival in the U.S. today with 2013 attendance surpassing 27,000 people, offering 150 events and generating more than a billion media impressions. <https://www.chicagoideas.com>

“As a nonprofit organization, it is important to find partners that are as passionate about the mission as we are,” said Kennedy, who first collaborated with CT in 2002 to produce Chicago’s DePaul University’s commencement. “I strive to create a team that will push one another to create the best event possible. CT’s staff helps us push the limits of what is possible. They understand our mission, vision and goals, and help us achieve extraordinary things within our budget.”

CT’s team provided A/V products, installation and technical support for two of Kennedy’s venues, a 300-seat theater within the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the 2,400-seat Cadillac Palace Theater. CT’s on-site team included Project Manager Logan Shunmugam and 12 technicians.

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“The Cadillac Palace Theater is an ornate building where the decor and architecture are part of the experience for the audience,” Shunmugam said. “Whatever we designed had to be subtle, non-obtrusive, functional and effective in producing dynamic effects worthy of world-renowned presenters.”

Launched in 2011, Chicago Ideas Week attracts high-profile, influential individuals to present on a range of dynamic topics at its programs.

Speakers have included President William J. Clinton, General Colin Powell (retired), author Deepak Chopra, journalist Tom Brokaw, designer Donna Karan, astronaut Buzz Aldrin and actor Edward Norton.



CT provided Kennedy with counseling, service and support beginning with the A/V system design through the end-of-event strike.

“We provided logistical support for all departments, including equipment transportation, delivery and building access,” Shunmugam said. “All of this had to be planned within the daily costs allotted by the client, including union labor costs. Labor union contracts have very specific cost structures which we base our workdays on. Therefore, we honored our estimates, worked within union rules and delivered the best product for the client, on time and within budget.”

Once the A/V equipment was set-up, it was time to “proof” what was, up until that point, a concept on paper.

“All the drawings, the math on resolution and size of images and screens can only be tested during set up,” Shunmugam said. “Proofing (testing equipment) is crucial in terms of the client’s confidence that events will go off without a hitch. Once the client is secure with knowing we have delivered what we promised, it is up to the event producers, speakers and entertainers to make the event a success.”

Equipment used in the Cadillac Place Theater included:

- 70-foot wide RP screen
- (6) HD26K Barco projectors
- (1) FSN switcher with 5 cameras
- 14 channels of KiPro Records
- (36) DVdosc speaker cabinets
- (6) Meyer 700HP speakers
- (2) VI6 digital audio consoles
- Encore switching system
- Monitor system for band
- Riedel communications system

Equipment for the Museum of Contemporary Arts included: (3) cameras, (2) Panasonic 10k projectors and (1) FSN switcher.

“CT’s equipment inventory is fantastic,” Kennedy added. “They are always bringing in new concepts and products that elevate our shows. CT was also able to, very generously, extend tremendous discounts that allowed us to do some beautiful things.”

Shunmugam admits there were challenges working within the historic Cadillac Palace Theater, built in 1926.

“The biggest challenge was the use of a large rear projection screen in a theatre with hardly any throw distance for the projectors,” Shunmugam said. “There was also uncontrolled air flow onstage that made the screen move like a huge sail. When the screen rippled with the airflow, the picture moved out of focus.

Once the CT team identified the problems, the team compensated for the shallow depth and rippling screen using electronics.

Following the successful execution of A/V services for the 2013 Chicago Ideas Week, Kennedy is looking forward to working with the CT team again in 2014.

“Chicago Ideas Week seeks to inspire attendees through the creation of dynamic, provocative programming, grass roots initiatives and connecting people,” Kennedy concluded. “CT’s staff’s always fresh perspective, array of products and commitment to perfection, make it possible to achieve these goals.”

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