

Dallas City Hall Opens Access with Sony Robotic HD Cameras

Customer:

- City of Dallas, Texas

Industry:

- Government

Challenges:

- Create easy remote access to city government meetings both in real-time and through streaming archives to maximize transparency of city government
- Greatly increase coverage of meetings without increasing A/V staff
- Provide broadcast-quality feed for news organizations to enable their coverage

Solution:

- Replace traditional standard definition video cameras/decks with Sony's BRC-H900/H700 high definition robotic PTZ cameras

Benefits:

- Documented 56 meetings per month using 8-person staff, feeding four 24/7 cable channels
- Provided vital link to both citizens and 13,000 city employees, reducing need for in-person appearances/travel time during work hours
- Improved media coverage of public meetings with pick-ups by TV network affiliates, plus footage for local newspaper websites

Beyond Definition



The standard for media outreach to provide transparency in government used to consist of publishing the schedule for public meetings. Then the arrival of public access television opened new avenues, with camera operators videotaping the most important sessions played over cable TV. Now, the city of Dallas is creating a new model for open government, utilizing Sony's BRC-series robotic full HD PTZ cameras. Aside from serving the public at large, this is also proving to be a powerful internal communications tool for the 13,000 city employees, as well as giving news media content to improve their coverage of City Hall.

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Dallas Public Information Office

The city's Public Information Office, working with Digital Resources, Inc, an A/V equipment and systems integrator based in Southlake, TX, is now finishing this fundamental transformation of the existing operation. The heart of the new system is a network of 22 BRC-H700 and 26 BRC-H900 cameras installed in 11 meeting rooms and public spaces plus the building's rooftop. Some 56 meetings monthly are captured with these cameras. The video of these sessions is recorded on central servers while played out live and then replayed over four 24/7 cable channels. It is also offered online both as a live stream, then on demand. This replaces a legacy SD video production setup of 12 manually operated cameras recording to tape decks. Because of the efficiencies of the BRCs' robotic operation, the new system operates with the same eight-person staff despite a four-fold increase in cameras.



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According to Tommy Reyna of the Dallas Public Information Office, the new system realizes the city council’s vision for open government.

“In 2014, we were tasked to see how we could achieve greater transparency for the city of Dallas—to increase programming and broadcast more meetings,” he said. “We found that Sony BRC cameras offer a fundamental advance over traditional approaches. With them, we are able to exceed expectations by not just increasing the number of meetings televised, but by providing comprehensive coverage.”

Two Teams Arrive at the Same Solution: Sony’s BRC

Reyna and his team began their search for ways to leverage emerging technologies two years ago at the NAB Show as a request for proposals went forward. Then after Digital Resources won

the bid for the contract, they compared notes with the provider.

“Our challenge was to see how to get the most transparency possible with the greatest value for the taxpayer,” said Tim Bock, Director of Sales and Marketing, Digital Resources. “Our teams independently selected the Sony BRC cameras as the best technology. Aside from the imaging excellence, the particular features of these cameras give tremendous flexibility.”

Bock noted that the combination of H700 and H900 cameras proved to be a perfect fit for the project. The H700s work best in larger spaces where zoom range is needed, while the H900s’ 1/2” sensors are ideal for delivering the best Full HD image needed for today’s exacting HD broadcast standards. Both can utilize optional interface cards to allow for maximum flexibility for installation and integration.

“The Sony BRC cameras were the obvious choice by every design criteria. The depth of the feature set, quality, and bulletproof reliability make these the best value over the long haul,” said Bock.

That flexibility proved crucial for installing the system in Dallas City Hall, a landmark designed by I.M. Pei. The building is essentially a large concrete block that was not designed with video production in mind. The Digital Resources design called for an IP-based system built on a fiber backbone. This was right both for the existing facility, but also affords future





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possibilities like locating production facilities outside of City Hall. Working around the city’s summer schedule, most of the work was completed by August 2015.

Transparent, Efficient City Government

The 48 BRC cameras are located in a wide variety of meeting areas including the city council chambers, a large auditorium, a flag room used for press conferences, and the lobby. Several cameras look out from the roof to the plaza in front of the building, offering scenic shots to enhance the productions. For the Public Information Office’s production team, the selection of camera shots gives a chance to accurately convey a sense of being on-site for those connecting online and over cable TV. While the system was primarily designed to improve the way individual

citizens and community groups could access meetings, it has already become a powerful tool for local media and city employees.

“Going from our legacy SD imaging to Full HD has brought us back up to current broadcast standards,” said Reyna. “Local media including newspapers as well as TV network affiliates are taking our feed for their stories. Newspaper readers can see the actual footage behind articles online, and the HD looks beautiful and cuts seamlessly with broadcast newscasts.”

Reyna added that helping support news organizations with video content has become essential, given the constraints on such reporting.

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quality footage is an enormous help to them. Instead of having to allocate a crew regularly to cover City Hall, reporters are able to create packages with our feed or supplement their own footage with our full coverage. Of course, this furthers our mission, reaching out to large audiences about what’s happening at City Hall,” said Reyna.

Another large audience that is turning in regularly is city employees. Before comprehensive coverage, many workers had to invest large blocks of time on the job to stay on top of meetings that involve their work. Now many can watch from the office or on mobile devices, which

allows them to be more productive by multitasking.

“The city of Dallas has some 13,000 employees, and so using this as an internal communication tool delivers tremendous value for the city. Tens of thousands of hours are saved, since city workers don’t have to invest commuter time to attend meetings. Aside from the cost savings, this encourages greater employee engagement, which translates to better services,” Reyna said.

True transparency, as provided by end-to-end coverage of city meetings, is unedited. But Reyna and his team are also increasing capabilities to create their own produced packages. Three of Sony’s Video Journalist backpacks featuring PXW-X180 XDCAM® camcorders are already in use, with more to be added. These camera packages have been vital in providing coverage of city events, press conferences, and breaking news that affect its citizens. Already, the Public Information Office’s success has demonstrated the value of the investment.

“The lifeblood of our community is public engagement, and Sony broadcast technology has helped us open our doors to welcome in many who are now joining us online and elsewhere. We are realizing the hope for democracy in our digital age,” said Reyna.

