Keys to the Digital Workplace

THE DESIRED RESULT: SEAMLESSLY LINKING TEAM MEMBERS ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD VIA A UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS SOLUTION

What is the digital workplace and why is it important?

The pandemic accelerated several workplace trends that had been slowly gaining traction in recent years: namely, a growing number of remote and hybrid employees and the expansion of video conferencing platforms. According to Upwork, more than one in five Americans will be working remotely by 2025, and research by Forrester "predicts that 70% of US and European companies will pivot to a hybrid work model post-pandemic." Microsoft Teams® hit the 250 million active monthly user mark in July of 2021, and Zoom™ saw staggering growth: from 10 million daily users in December of 2019 to 350 million a year later.

The takeaway? The digital workplace — with its combination of remote and in-person collaborators who need to communicate effectively — is here to stay.

THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE IS HERE TO STAY.

THE TRANSITION HASN'T BEEN WITHOUT ITS FRICTIONS

INCOMPATIBILITY Lockdowns arrived suddenly, and many companies had no choice but to cobble together solutions that may have utilized a variety of devices and platforms that didn't "work and play well" with one another.

USER EXPERIENCE Employees with little remote experience may have struggled to learn when using devices or platforms with less-than-intuitive interfaces. Poor audio and video solutions can further impact an employee's collaborative contributions — whether they're at home or in the boardroom.

CONNECTIVITY Some employees may have felt frustrated, lonely, or detached from their teams. It's why proper connectivity — including both human interaction and robust internet links — is so important.

SCHEDULING AND MANAGEMENT Connecting those at home with those in the office, keeping everyone engaged and on-time, and ensuring there are rooms and devices ready-to-go for meetings and presentations are all critical to collaborative success.

SECURITY A broad range of devices on a company network, machines accessed by family members with little cybersecurity oversight, and less-than-secure home networks can be potential headaches for a corporate IT department. The same holds true for in-office workers, guests, and devices — connectivity and access to the network must be carefully managed.

THE SOLUTION
CREATING A HIGH-PERFORMANCE DIGITAL WORKPLACE

The right digital workplace seamlessly links team members anywhere in the world. While specifics can vary wildly — from the physical footprint of a room to a team member's individual needs for, say, sharing content — there are some fundamental considerations when choosing a solution:

- **Is the platform easy to use?** Easy to deploy? Easy to support, monitor, and troubleshoot? Are clear and concise training resources available?

- **Does it include devices that are purpose-built?** Can those devices provide intelligent video, clear audio, localized AV options, intuitive content distribution, and effective video conferencing solutions?

- **Does the solution include scheduling tools** to ensure that rooms, desks, and equipment are all available?

- **Is the solution scalable** — can you easily add or change spaces, and support those spaces?

- **Is the platform "future-ready"** — can it handle upgrades as new technologies are developed?

How to choose a digital workplace technology platform

Next, you'll need to think about your business specific needs.

Ask yourself the following:

- **What types of spaces will best serve your organization** — perhaps a few huddle rooms and a larger conference space? Is a big boardroom or auditorium in the mix? How many rooms do you think you'll need?

- **Will on-premises or cloud functionality best serve your remote and mobile workers?** How can you support — in real-time — every member of the team?

- **What are the distribution paths** that will push organizational content to all devices?

- **Which broadband paths and topologies** will ensure that your corporate network isn't overloaded?

- **What kind of operating systems** and conference platforms will match your needs?

- **Today's workplace is constantly changing**, so the need for scalable, flexible platforms that grow and change with the business are key. How can we make the solutions adaptable — "future ready?"

- **What resources are we using to prop up what may be a legacy system?** What are the costs of operating and maintaining those systems as technology advances beyond their capabilities?

DIGITAL WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS

The right platform provides effective solutions for each of three pillars: video conferencing, wireless presentation, and scheduling.

ENSURE ALL PARTICIPANTS AN EQUAL SEAT.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

The right video conferencing solution is key to the success of your digital workplace. **Aspects of a system include:**

VIDEO – Ensure you have the right camera for the space, whether that lens needs to provide coverage for a room full of people or a single individual at their desk. Make sure that camera is supported by an intelligent video solution with features such as framing and tracking to ensure that all participants have an "equal seat" at the table.

AUDIO – Speakers and microphones are just as important as video considerations — arguably, even more so. (As long as a team member has audio, they can participate in a meeting.) Mics that provide proper coverage for the size of the room, speakers that are free from distortion, and features such as echo-canceling facilitate more natural conversations and effective presentations. Remote workers or participants from a single desk or office space may choose a headphone rig with an attached mic — providing for those preferences is more than a morale boost, it can be important if an employee's joining the team from a crowded space and needs to shut out ambient noise.

WIRED VS. WIRELESS – Is a meeting participant presenting from a laptop via a Wi-Fi® connection, or are they sharing content via USB and/or HDMI cabling? Does the platform allow for one or both? If the connection is completely wireless, is the Wi-Fi in the space robust and reliable? Are your remote workers joining a meeting via Wi-Fi or a cabled connection? Have you ensured their connection is reliable as well?

WIRELESS PRESENTATION

Hybrid work requires the ability to host a meeting from anywhere, whether everyone is in the room, working remotely, or a combination of the two. You'll need a solution that provides the flexibility to share, present, and host a local or hybrid meeting from one device. Whether you're in a huddle space, auditorium, or board room, together with everyone in one location or distributed across time zones, you need a system that efficiently integrates devices for effortless collaboration, presentation, video conferencing, and digital signage throughout your enterprise.

SCHEDULING

As hybrid work becomes the standard, businesses must provide the technology necessary to ensure every employee has a space to meet, collaborate, and conduct independent work and be productive. An effective scheduling system prevents the team from wandering around the facility, hunting for a space to work.

Scheduling elements to consider include:

BOOKING – In-office work will consist of a mix of hoteling or hotdesking for independent work and meeting space booking for employees to collaborate. As employees come and go on different schedules, managing available spaces will need to be top of mind. Solutions that include both room and desk bookings are optimum.

AVAILABILITY – A system that can identify the right space and determine if rooms are available for ad-hoc meetings is extraordinarily helpful; solutions that include an external indicator such as a light, panel, or shingle let the team quickly determine if a space is available.

UTILIZATION – To make the best decisions about designing your workplace, you need detailed insights about what spaces are used, how they are used, and by whom. If a system provides the proper data analytics, you'll be able to make more informed planning and budgeting decisions: What type of spaces do we need? How many? Where? To support what activities?

FLEXIBILITY – Does the hardware or infrastructure natively support your preferred scheduling application? If your organizational needs change and you want to change software, you should be able to do so without having to "rip and replace" any of the installed devices.

SCANNING AND SENSING – Does the system include options for badge scanning to start and end a meeting? Can occupancy sensors be added to the mix to gather usage data?

ROOM CONTROL

LOCALIZED, AUTOMATED AV CONTROL – Does the system allow you to configure the room so the occupancy sensor or scheduling panel, when activated, triggers the room to enter a specific state? For example: Upon entering a huddle room, the shades come down, lights increase in brightness, and displays and other devices come out of sleep mode.

INTEGRATION WITH THIRD-PARTY DEVICES – Does the system provide an open platform that automatically recognizes and integrates devices that aren't native to the system? As new technologies become available, having a system that can integrate with other peripherals seamlessly is important — and this is yet another way to ensure that your system is future-ready.
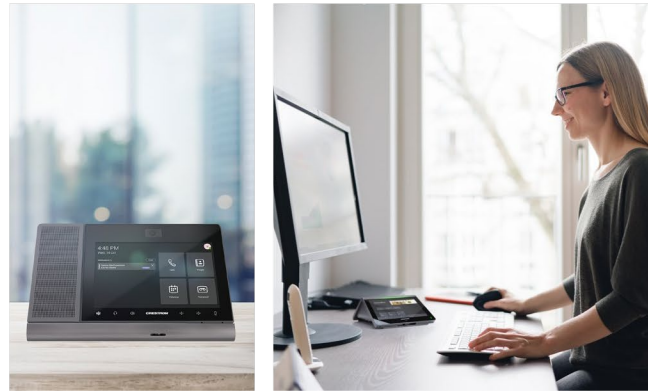
DIGITAL WORKPLACE CONSIDERATIONS

While spaces (and their intended purposes) will vary, an important consideration is maintaining a consistent user experience for everyone, no matter their location, while still tailoring the solution to the space.

OFFICES

Defined as a space for individual productivity — whether it's part of a company facility or a remote/home workstation — solutions for individuals need all the functionality of any space, no matter its purpose. Clear audio and video are essential whether sound is delivered via speakers or headphones — and the ability to quickly and easily share content with the team should be a top priority. It's imperative that a remote worker feel as connected to a collaborative session or meeting as those who are occupying the same physical space. Every station should be similarly equipped in hotdesking or hoteling setups. Organizations should standardize hardware and software solutions to create an ecosystem that delivers consistency, equity, and engagement. IT departments may need to ship devices to remote workers and push out configurations from the cloud to ensure adherence with organizational policies and standards.

SMALL ROOMS

Huddle rooms that allow for one to five employees to collaborate are often used for brainstorming or strategic sessions. Many executive offices fit into this category as well. Functionality for wireless presentations and the option to collaborate and edit materials are often important in these spaces. The need for a guest to "BYOD" — "bring your own device" — for a presentation or a pitch enters the equation here, too. As a result, your ecosystem can't be completely walled-off from these applications, and your collaboration tools should be ready to communicate with a third-party device. (There's more on this in the next section.)

MEDIUM ROOMS

A room that can comfortably seat up to 10 people needs all the functionality of a smaller room, but any video display that's specified should be large enough for ease of viewing for anyone in the room. Audio and video start to need special attention in a room of this size — does the mic array completely cover the available space? If sidebar conversations or soft-spoken team members are added into the mix, can remote workers hear all that's being said? Is there an intelligent video system that gives all virtual participants an "equal seat at the table?"

LARGE ROOMS

A large boardroom that typically seats 10 to 20 people may need multiple displays so that each attendee has clear visual access to content or remote attendees. Cameras will need to effectively capture all the participants. Mic solutions may need to amplify the people within the room, not just those who are attending remotely. Tabletop mics can do double duty in this regard, providing amplification for physical and digital attendees. Any speaker solution will need enough power and headroom to avoid distortion.
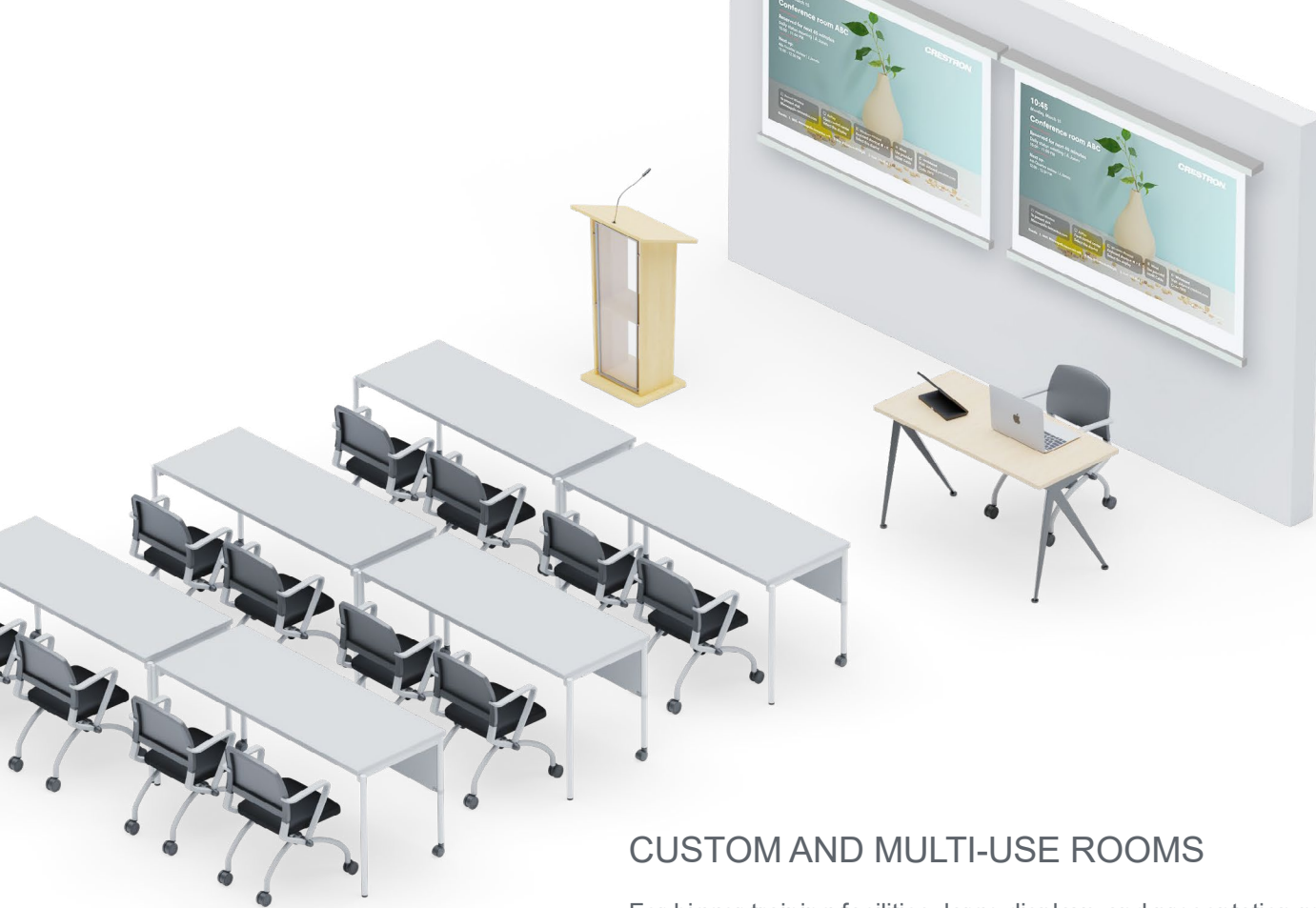
CUSTOM AND MULTI-USE ROOMS

For bigger training facilities, large displays and presentation mics and podiums/lecterns are often a must. Other considerations: Does the presenter need to move about? Will some attendees be remote? Again, guest speakers or instructors may BYOD, and seamless connectivity is critical. For rooms of this size and larger, dual projection systems may be vital. For divisible rooms, it's important to remember that mics, speakers, displays, and connectivity must be appropriately positioned to accommodate the full open space as well as multiple configurations, including each smaller space.
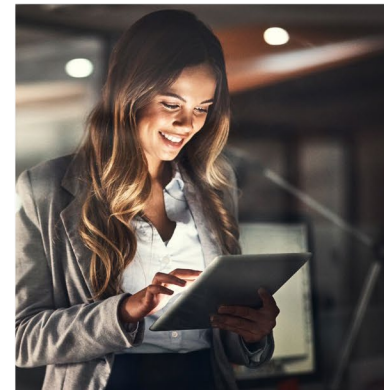
WHAT'S YOUR PREFERRED CONFERENCING PLATFORM AND OPERATING SYSTEM?

Whether your organization prefers Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or another product, finding a solution that's designed to work effortlessly with your preferred platform will maximize room uptime.

A SINGLE INTERFACE FOR ALL YOUR CONFERENCING AND COLLABORATION NEEDS.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Implementing an open platform that is equipped to meet the needs of each space will provide consistency. For example: Your organization might have several huddle spaces, boardrooms, interactive classrooms, a training facility, and an auditorium. Each of those spaces will need specific solutions to deliver the right user experience, but they should all be easy to operate, so choose a solution that supports a consistent experience everywhere.

Whether you use Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or your own conferencing system, you should be able to leverage a single interface to facilitate all your conferencing and collaboration needs. This method will ensure that everything works, that no device is vulnerable, and that none of the solutions require a certain skill set to operate in advance.

Even if your organization uses Teams or Zoom – and that conferencing platform has been standardized by the IT department – there will be guests, clients, and vendors who won't necessarily be using your preferred platform. **Can the system support other options with minimal effort?**

ANOTHER CONSIDERATION

Is Windows® your preferred OS? Apple® OS or iOS? Are many of your employees on Android™ tablets for a particular job?

Whatever solution you choose, you'll need to confirm that it integrates well with your OS. Additionally — especially when BYOD employees and guests enter the collaboration — any ecosystem you run with needs to function on multiple operating systems.
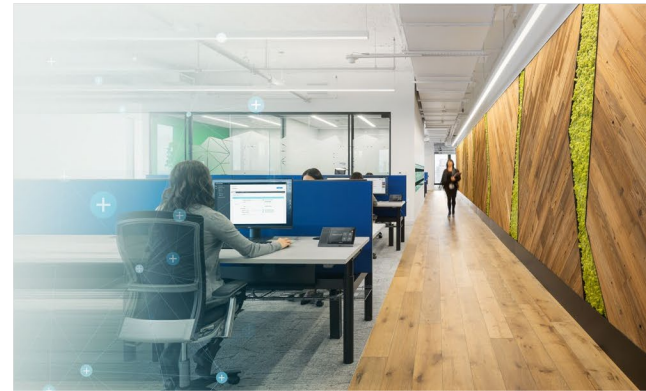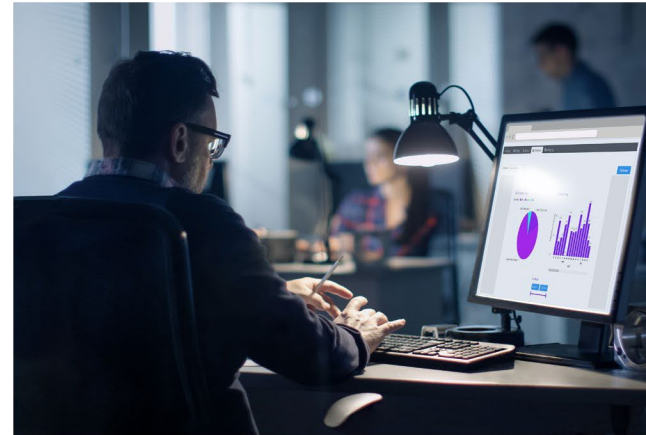
CLOUD-BASED DEPLOYMENT, MANAGEMENT, AND MONITORING

There are a broad range of advantages when a system features cloud-based deployment, management, and monitoring. Here are some questions to consider.

A WELL-DESIGNED, INTUITIVE DASHBOARD CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE.

CAN THE SOLUTION SUPPORT ROOMS REMOTELY?

There are solutions that send automated, event-based alerts to laptops and mobile devices so you can resolve issues — and if there's a problem, you can take control of devices remotely to troubleshoot and resolve technical issues faster. The last thing anyone in your organization wants is a call to IT for assistance in the middle of a critical meeting, or a room going unused because an issue hasn't been reported. Issues that are resolved quickly — from anywhere — make for fewer interruptions and smoother workflows.

CAN YOU MANAGE DEVICE LIFECYCLES?

Look for a system that provides a comprehensive view of device lifecycles, which enables you to schedule updates, prepare budgets, and anticipate needs more efficiently. Imagine a system that tracks when licenses will lapse — how can that help you with planning and budgeting? What workflow interruptions could you avoid if you had complete control of the timing of software and firmware updates? Additionally, a well-designed, intuitive dashboard can make a world of difference.
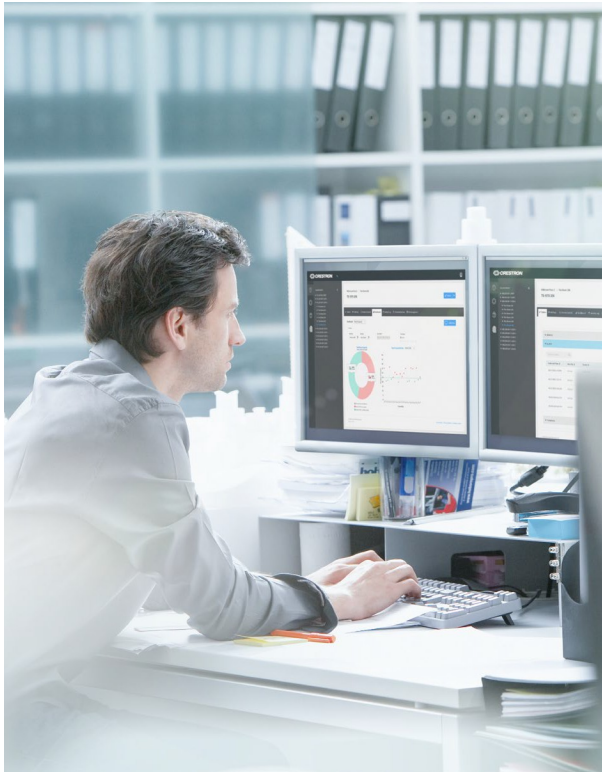
HOW SIMPLE IS IT TO MAINTAIN OPERATIONS STANDARDS?

Does the system allow you to establish standard room configurations and remotely deploy them to individual or groups of rooms at the same time? Can firmware and software updates be pushed remotely to individual, groups, or all devices at once? Can you establish event schedules for turning rooms on in the morning, off in the evening, and account for weekends and holidays? You'll also need a solution that can identify threats and breaches, especially on networks with BYOD options.

WHAT DATA CAN BE COLLECTED AND ANALYZED?

There are solutions that automatically collect room and device usage data and generate reports to drive better planning and budgeting. Some systems provide granular info about what technology is used down to individual button presses — including how it is used (e.g., connectivity methods), and how often devices are used.
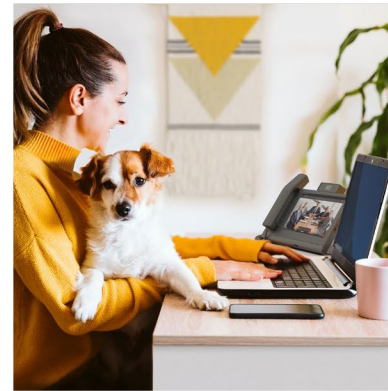
ACTION ITEMS

The following checklist is meant to help you identify the issues you're facing and choose the right solution. Different organizations' needs will vary when it comes to platform and OS preferences, scale, and percentage of remote workers.

STEP ONE ASSESSMENT AND AWARENESS

First, you'll need to understand the challenges you — and
the system you choose — will be confronting.

- Employees are working on-site and off-site, with flex hours.

- People want to use personal devices for workflows and corporate collaboration.

- As the business landscape changes, IT pain points will increase.

- The demand for software- and cloud-based collaboration solutions is surging.

- More Help Desk tickets are identifying compatibility and interoperability problems.

IDENTIFY THE SOLUTIONS THAT WILL HELP YOUR TEAM ADAPT.

STEP TWO DEFINE OBJECTIVES, CRAFT YOUR PLAN

Next, figure out what you need to address.

- Identify the limitations of current ad hoc methods.

- Examine how technology influences worker productivity and morale.

- Conduct a site audit and explore use cases.

- Define your desired outcomes for consistency, performance, and connectivity.

- Outline your organization's objectives and needs for communications and collaboration solutions.

- Evaluate technologies that will help you meet organizational KPIs.

- Determine if purchasing and provisioning on a monthly SaaS (software-as-a-service) basis is advantageous, versus buying outright or leasing.

- Identify the processes and solutions that will help your team adapt.

- Craft a communications and collaboration plan led by a unified vision.

- Find an ecosystem that will yield benefits that extend organically to every worker and workspace in your business.

STEP THREE IMPLEMENT A SOLUTION

Finally, pick your partner.

- Find an end-to-end partner — preferably with an ecosystem approach that provides a breadth of solutions and services to help you meet your objectives.

- Center a strategy that gives workers the freedom to choose applications while staying fully interoperable with all tools.

- Foreground an open platform approach in which new communications and collaboration tools can be integrated with legacy technologies.

- Select a partner with the open sensibility to natively support third-party solutions, who can deploy and manage every device across the enterprise and across the world.

- Work with a partner who will help keep the human experience top-of-mind.

Looking for a platform solution that solves all the issues outlined above? With Crestron Flex, you can walk into any space confident you'll have the best audio/video experience with access to video conferencing, wireless presentation, and smart room control — from any device. From desktops to training rooms, home offices to global headquarters, Crestron Flex helps you keep everyone seamlessly and securely connected.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

📞 **888.414.3806**

✉️ sales@mccannsystems.com

🔗 mccannsystems.com

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: CRESTRON FLEX