



Bob Boster

(On New Year's Eve 2011, Bob Boster was named president of Clear-Com, the manufacturer of backstage communications systems. He has a long history at Clear-Com and elsewhere, and roots in both the theatre and broadcast industries. Below, he discusses the challenges of his new job and what's next for Clear-Com.)

Lighting&Sound America: What are your goals for Clear-Com?

Bob Boster: From a business standpoint, we hope to continue to grow our activities. With my arrival as president, we're focused on continuity, as opposed to starting over from scratch. That was part of the reason for selecting me. I have been part of the executive team over the last two or three years. This year, we're focusing on trying to do a more efficient job of communicating what our new products can do. In 2011, we saw a real success with products that had been on the market for some time; the fact that they came into their own at that point suggested that we haven't done the best job of communicating what we've got.

LSA: How are you looking to communicate with your customers?

BB: It's different in different markets. In your readers' market, the most important thing is to be able to tell a story that shows what the product looks like in an application. People respond enthusiastically to the idea that a product has been used in a specific circumstance, along with a drawing of how it was and what it looked like.

LSA: Many companies are taking their products to the public via road shows.

BB: We've seen the road show trend also, and have been doing some work in that space. We imagine doing more of it in 2012, because we have a number of new products on our release schedule. And, of course, there are still many trade shows, which are part of any manufacture's breathing activities. But there are other interesting ways to do it. We've seen success with training videos. A well-written and coherent case study, whether in a publication or on the web or both, can add a great deal of value. And really, all these things have to synergize for any of them to work.

LSA: Can you tell us something about your new products?

BB: Our big releases for the first part of the year will be keyed around NAB, although we'll be previewing a few things at Prolight + Sound. And we'll be at USITT with our

regular product line. Of the three major debuts, two of them should be very interesting to your readers.

LSA: I understand that you started out in the theatre.

BB: I did, at the age of seven. I was working backstage at eight. I wore one of those Clear-Com belt packs! This was in community theatre in eastern Connecticut. When I was at University of North Carolina, I ran a theatre company; I directed, designed lighting and sound, and worked as a technical director. Occasionally, I still design sound for theatre and dance.

LSA: What did you do after that?

BB: I got into broadcast and electronic music as I moved onto Mills College [in Oakland, California] for my degree. In my composing career, I was interested in the performance end of electronic music as opposed to a traditional composition environment. I started at [broadcast technology specialist] Orban while I was still in school, doing user interface design in the engineering department. I moved into the engineering department, creating software for radio stations. Then I went to ENCO Systems [the provider of radio automation and audio delivery for TV] where I was a product manager and, later, general manager. I was based in Horsham, which is near London. Eventually, I moved into sales.

LSA: Did you enjoy sales?

BB: Both at Enco and here at Clear-Com, sales is about helping people solve their problems. It isn't 18 holes of golf and drinks at the club afterward. We have to add value to our customers; it's really a light engineering task. I enjoy that. At Clear-Com, we do business in a lot of different spaces; in one week, I can deal with people in theatre, television, and at NASA. That kind of opportunity doesn't just happen. It's pretty cool.

LSA: You seem to have your priorities in order.

BB: This is a time for Clear-Com to get to the next level, finding ourselves as a company distributed across multiple markets. We will come out of this transitional period knowing better than ever who we are and what we're doing for our customers. 📶