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## Case Study

# KHOU-TV discovers AMX switching system is best flood insurance to stay on-air

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Jeff Lovetinsky  
Director of Information Technology  
KHOU-TV

### System relocation a top priority

In the summer of 2001, nearly all of Houston was at least partially underwater as a deluge of rain from Tropical Storm Allison pounded the area. At KHOU-TV, Houston's CBS Network affiliate, meteorologists tracked the storm and reported how the community was holding up.

Meanwhile, the station was fighting its own battle with the elements. Things proved challenging as water seeped into the studio and flooded the first floor computer room. Station staffers, moving quickly, scrambled to get all the equipment off the floor and keep the station on the air.

Although they were successful in relocating station systems, which helped the news team deliver continuous coverage, the IT team was left with a very clear message in Allison's wake: relocate their systems in a manner that would still allow users to access and control them from the first floor.

The solution they chose to deploy is the Avocent AMX® KVM switching system. KHOU IT staff moved much of their hardware to the safer confines of the building's second floor. They consolidated control of their computers and devices into a single user interface which allowed operators and engineers in multiple locations to access the same devices from the live studio.

KHOU provides local news, weather, sports, and special features of interest to the greater Houston market and surrounding area. Owned by Belo, the ninth largest media company in the U.S., the station leads its competition in providing breaking weather information in Houston. The station Website, KHOU.com, features a downtown weather cam, several Doppler radar options and personalized weather forecasts on demand.

### AMX switches at work

Because of its close proximity to the coast, Houston can experience severe weather several times throughout any given year. Recognizing that what happened with Allison could occur again, Jeff Lovetinsky, director of information technology, began looking for a solution to keep IT equipment high, dry and accessible. He wanted to get systems off the first floor, enable connectivity from the studio and maintain the ability to stay on-air even during the most intense weather situations.

“Our number one goal is to stay on the air and provide the community with important news and breaking weather information,” he said. “We can’t do that if our systems are underwater. So, we’re trying to be better prepared should the building flood, again.”

Before Allison, all weather computers were stacked in the weather office on the first floor of the building. Although on the same floor, some hardware was in different rooms connected by Avocent LongView® extenders, providing access to an individual item from one room to another. At multiple locations, eight different PCs or servers were connected to one KVM switch and each system had a dedicated monitor, keyboard and mouse. Users would have to roll among the different computer systems throughout the day and know which servers enabled access to which box.

After the Allison flood incident, the KHOU-TV IT staff placed an emphasis on removing technical hardware off the first floor and that required a solution that would enable remote access to their equipment. Learning about the Avocent AMX switch solution at the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) trade show, Lovetinsky was impressed with how it could address his needs for remote control in a broadcast environment. At the same time, the AMX switch delivered additional benefits like centralized management. Users could log on at any workstation and gain access to servers or PCs without having to travel throughout the building.

“One of the reasons we chose Avocent is because we used their hardware solutions in the past and were always pleased with their performance and reliability,” said Lovetinsky. “The AMX solution has made relocating our weather systems to another floor while giving us the connectivity we need a reality.”

KHOU purchased the Avocent AMX5120 user station, three AMX5010 switches and one AMX5000 switch. In addition, the station

purchased the Avocent AMIQ server interface modules for their PS/2, USB and serial-based devices. The AMIQ module provides connection from the server to the switch, reduces cable bulk and saves rack space.

“We began with implementing access to all of our weather computer systems such as our on-air weather radars and satellite imaging,” said Lovetinsky. “Now we have expanded the solution to include our master control on-air operations, graphic systems and all of the IT server systems.”

Lovetinsky advises others who consider purchasing an Avocent AMX switching system to buy the biggest one available as there will always be more devices they will want to connect to their system. And, in order to connect more and more devices, you need additional ports. At KHOU, they have over 120 devices connected to the switches and plan to add more.

#### **Distance range an added benefit**

Although the biggest benefits of the system are remote access and centralized control, Lovetinsky also appreciates the cleaner cabling benefit and distance range. The AMX system connects to multi-platform KVM peripherals and sends the KVM signals over an industry-standard UTP cable to an Avocent AMX matrix switch.

“Cabling through the CAT 5 cable infrastructure has been great,” he said. “It is much cleaner and we can use the same cabling for KVM that we have in the walls for Ethernet. The other thing that has been super is the distance range. Before, we could only get a maximum of 25 feet away from the KVM switch. Now we can get high bandwidth video from up to 1,000 feet away.”

Moving forward, Lovetinsky anticipates taking advantage of new features as the AMX switching system evolves. Of immediate interest is getting tablet connectivity on certain user stations and audio capability to allow IT staff to transmit sound across other

user stations. For now, Lovetinsky plans to add more systems to the solution with its simple plug and play connectivity.

“The Avocent solution gives us the connectivity we need and has allowed us to put our hardware in a centralized rack room, allowing user access throughout the building,” Lovetinsky concluded. “We had a need to locate our computer hardware separate from our users and the system met that need. It was very easy to install, easy to reconfigure and as the product grows and comes out with new features we intend to implement them.”

#### **About Avocent**

Avocent® is the leading worldwide supplier of KVM (keyboard, video and mouse) switching, remote access and serial connectivity solutions. IT managers benefit through access and control of servers and other network data center devices.

Branded products include switching, extension, intelligent platform management interface (IPMI), remote access, wireless, mobile, and video display solutions. DSView® 3 management software provides fully redundant failover authentication. Avocent KVM solutions are in Fortune 100 companies globally. Avocent has sales, operations and R&D centers worldwide. Corporate headquarters are in Huntsville, Alabama. Visit [www.avocent.com](http://www.avocent.com) for more information about Avocent products.



*The Avocent AMX5010 KVM switch captures the keyboard, video and mouse signals from each workstation and relays them to the relevant server. Staff can share information from the same computer just as if they had direct access.*