

James S. McDonnell Planetarium

Auri™ gives guests the full auditory experience at the James S. McDonnell Planetarium.



The James S. McDonnell Planetarium is a well-known St. Louis landmark, home to the Bill and Laura Orthwein StarBay Theater. This 80-foot dome recently reopened as the largest and most advanced hybrid planetarium in the United States. Live, educator-led shows play out under the dome for around 150 guests at a time, mixing upright and reclining chairs so everyone can comfortably take in the overhead view. These 45-minute shows take guests on a quest through space and Earth, with options to ask questions along the way.



CHALLENGE

The StarBay Theater had been getting by with an older assistive listening system that checked the ADA compliance boxes. Unfortunately, because of the concrete construction and the mix of upright and reclining chairs in the theater, guests with hearing loss never got a great experience out of it.

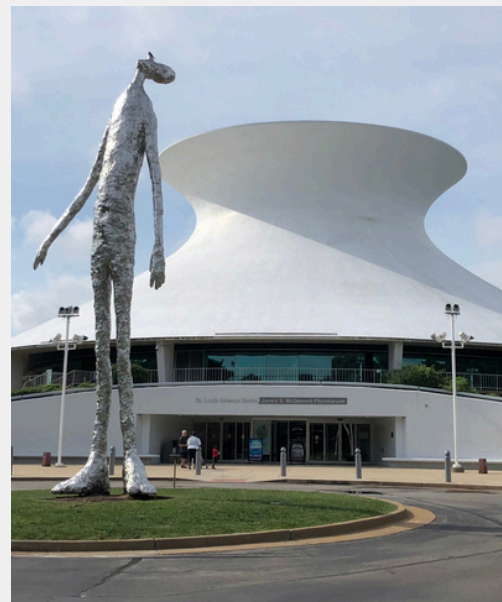
The team wanted more than a box-checking fit. They wanted something that would actually make the experience better for guests, hold up inside an older concrete building, and handle two different listening needs at once: regular room audio (like speakers, sound effects, and music) and a separate, cleaner narration-only feed for anyone who wants to tune out distracting noise.



SOLUTION

The planetarium reached out to SenseArt to learn what options were available for assistive listening. After trying a couple of options, they landed on the Auri system.

A few things sealed the deal for the team. The Auri receivers are smaller and easier to use than competing options, so guests of any age can pick one up and use it right away. Since the whole planetarium experience depends on darkness, the design mattered a lot too. Auri receivers only light up for a brief moment when you adjust the volume, then go dark again. Auri's all-in-one transmitter also meant skipping the rack mount and separate transmitter the competing system needed. Finally, the adjustable coverage gave the team more control over how far the signal reaches, something they're planning to lean on more as they look at spaces where they don't want just anyone listening in.



His grandson got a receiver too, so he could be just like grandpa.



The setup includes eight Auri receivers, two docking stations, and a two-channel transmitter with Dante® support. This setup gives the planetarium two audio streams running at once and multiple ways for guests to tune in — through receivers, a neckloop/receiver combo, or their own devices.

Guests learn about the assistive listening options at the planetarium through signage around the venue, slides that play before each show, info on the planetarium's website, and details shown when they buy tickets online.

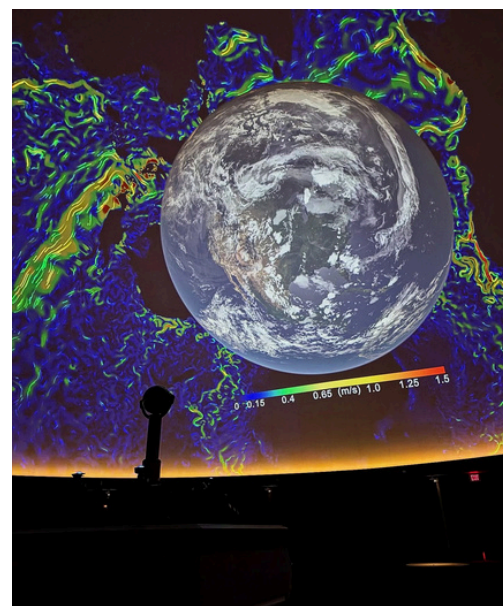


RESULT

Requests for assistive listening at the planetarium were usually pretty rare. However, since the system went live, these requests have really taken off. On the very first day of the install, five or six guests asked for a receiver, which was way more interest than the team had seen before. Since then, guests have kept coming back with great feedback about the audio quality. The system also hasn't had any issues with latency or dropped signal.

One story really stood out to the team. An older gentleman asked for a receiver for himself, and within a few seconds, his grandson got one too so he could be just like his grandpa. Guests with cochlear implants have also used the neckloops available with the receivers and shared positive feedback of their own.

It's also been easy on the staff side. Receivers are set up to power on and go to the right channel the moment they're pulled off the dock, so there hasn't been any extra hassle for the team in terms of setting up receivers. The only learning curve they've run into is helping guests who are trying to connect with their own device. Since there are so many apps and devices, staff don't always know how to make it work. However, they expect things to get easier after they've worked with several different types of devices and apps.



PRODUCTS USED

- (8) AURI-RX1 Receivers
- (1) AURI-TX2N 2 Channel Transmitter (with Dante® support)
- (2) AURI-D4 Docking Stations

Because everyone deserves the same great experience.