

## Theatre Production Team Transforms Workflow with Flexible Wireless Intercom Systems

With Clear-Com's Encore partyline and CellCom wireless intercom system, Alley Theatre strengthens teamwork, streamlines workflow, and takes their already superb productions to an even higher level of excellence.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUSTOMER: Alley Theatre

- Houston, Texas
- 75,000 sq. ft. Alley Theatre Center for Theatre Production
- 824-seat Hubbard Stage
- 310-seat Neuhaus Stage

### BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Difficulty reaching people and accessing information
- Slow turnaround for production changes
- Minimize support requirements
- Contain costs

### INTERCOM SOLUTION

- 2 RM-704 Encore Partyline Remote Stations
- 4 KB-702 Speaker Stations
- RS-501 and RS-502 Wired Beltpacks
- CellCom 1.92-1.93GHz Wireless Base Station
- 13 CellCom Wireless Beltpacks
- 8 CEL-TA Active Transceiver Antennas
- CellCom Battery Pack and Plug Chargers
- PS-704 Power Supplies

### BUSINESS RESULTS

- Improved teamwork and collaboration
- Flexible systems accelerate issue resolution
- Create better work environment
- Complete, future-proof communications infrastructure



Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*, an Alley Theatre Summer Chills Production

## Background

The Alley Theatre has earned national and international recognition, including the Tony Award, for its creative and high quality productions. Through its rich offering of fresh new plays and favored classics, the theatre company has never failed to surpass the expectations of their audience – always guaranteed to deeply inspire the heart, wildly entertain the mind, and captivate the soul.

Based in Houston, Texas, the Alley Theatre supports a company of actors, designers, artisans and craftspeople throughout the year, a trait of American Theatre companies that is few and far between. Productions are developed and rehearsed in the Alley Theatre Center for Theatre Production, which is their state-of-the-art 75,000-square-foot facility. Accompanying this are the 824-seat Hubbard Stage and the 310-seat Neuhaus Stage.

With all the time, money and energy that the production team

invests to prepare for the show, it was crucial for all their technologies, especially their voice communication systems, to function exceptionally so that they can deliver a winning performance to their audience every time. According to Pierre Dupree, Sound Supervisor, Alley Theatre, “Live theatre has zero tolerance for failure. Since it is live, if someone misses a cue, we can’t go back and fix it because it has already happened. The reliability and quality of our intercom systems is of utmost importance.”

For over 10 years, Alley Theatre has been using two UHF wireless intercoms with limited range and four beltback capacity, two Clear-Com Encore partyline systems, and Clear-Com speaker stations. Although the wired intercoms were still performing remarkably well, coordination with the wireless systems has always been difficult and time consuming. This is evident even more so since the rapid development of their productions, which has demanded more than their wireless systems could deliver. This would thrust the team into unexpected, high-pressure predicaments. To maintain their competitive edge as a distinguished theatre company, the production team agreed that they needed high performance intercoms to effectively facilitate and streamline their workflow.

## Business Challenges

### **Difficulty reaching people and accessing information**

The production team members need to correspond with each other, both within and between the Alley Theatre Center for Theatre Production, Hubbard Stage, and Neuhaus Stage. Unfortunately, their wireless systems could only provide sufficient coverage for one theatre, either the Hubbard Stage or the Neuhaus Stage. Those collaborating in the other regions only had access to their wired systems, leaving them isolated from their peers on the wireless intercom and hampering them from carrying out their responsibilities with full efficiency.

### **Slow turnaround for production changes**

Because of the shifting requirements of the varied production landscape, audio had to be re-routed constantly. Nonetheless, the wired partyline main stations had been linked to the wireless systems through a complicated labyrinth of cables due to the layout of the theatres’ stage, seating and equipment. Therefore, their only means of changing key assignments for each production was by patching the cables, a process that was both time-consuming and arduous.



824-Seat Hubbard Stage

### **Minimize support requirements**

Whenever a wireless beltpack ran out of battery life, the user would need to go to the Alley Theatre's only charging station to get it recharged. Although they only had four beltpacks for each wireless system, the process to charge each beltpack was unreasonably tedious. The user would need to turn off the headset, undo the holder, disconnect the headset from the beltpack and then placed it on the charger. An audio technician or the sound supervisor must double check each beltpack for perfect operation after it is charged. In urgent situations, someone must immediately find regular non-rechargeable batteries for the user.

Furthermore, the wireless intercoms and technologies of the event venues located near Alley Theatre would interfere with their own wireless intercoms, hindering conversations and creating communication challenges. For instance, their production will be running smoothly during the preview and opening when, without warning, there will be audio disruption. When interference was at its worst, they would need to respond quickly by shutting down the beltpack and reprogram its frequency. Alternately, the Alley Theatre team wanted an intercom system that would offer reliable coverage even when other sites in the vicinity were operating wireless systems.

### **Contain costs**

The limited range and low beltpack capacity of Alley Theatre's wireless intercom systems left them with a potentially expensive dilemma, which would have been prohibitive for the theatre. They would need to purchase more wireless intercoms to not only enable sufficient coverage across the entire facility, but to have enough beltpacks to accommodate an increasing number of production team members. Integrating these separate wireless systems with the wired partyline intercom was yet another obstacle they would need to overcome.

## **The Intercom Solution**

### **Choosing Clear-Com**

In the test for reliability, Alley Theatre's Clear-Com Encore partyline systems had already passed with flying colors, proving robust even after 10 years of use. With that already positive experience backed by Clear-Com's strong reputation of supplying outstanding solutions for critical applications, Clear-Com was the obvious choice for intercoms.

Dupree asserts, "Because the reliable performance of intercom systems is what matters most, we immediately recognized the value of and our continued need for Clear-Com, the number one brand in high quality theatre communications equipment."

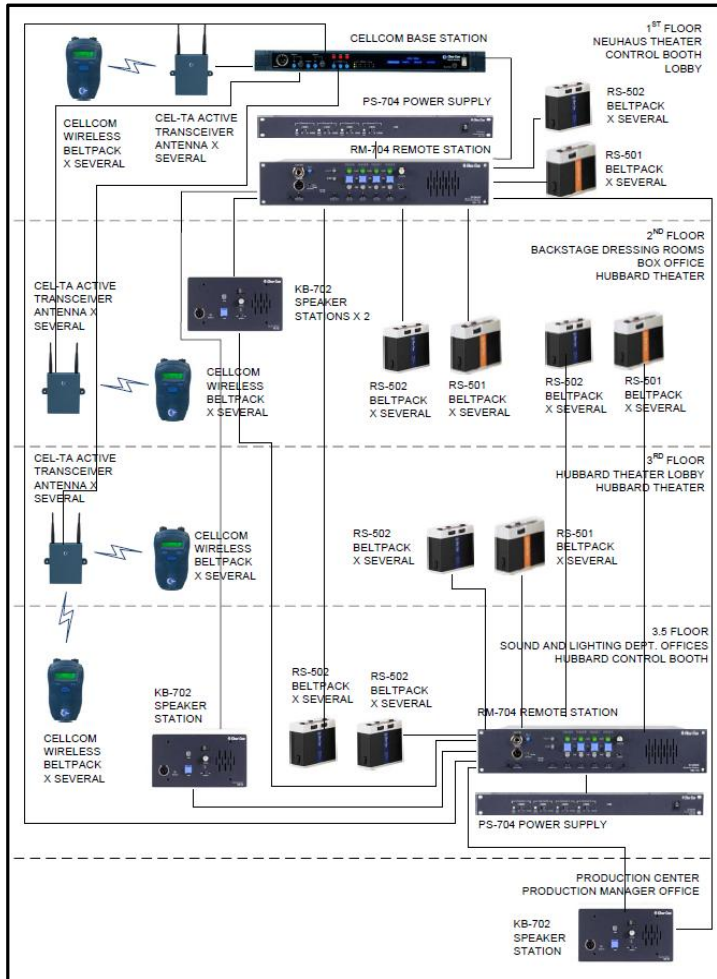
Alley Theatre made a radical departure from their legacy wireless intercoms by selecting Clear-Com's CellCom 1.9 GHz base station, eight CEL-TA active transceiver antennas, 13 CellCom wireless beltpacks, and CellCom battery pack and plug chargers. The CellCom base station, which was flawlessly integrated with the Encore partyline systems in the Hubbard Stage and Neuhaus Stage, was installed in the front of house position of the Neuhaus Stage.



**Fred Schoppe, Sound Engineer at Alley Theatre, Uses a Cellcom Wireless Beltpack**

The antennas were distributed throughout the four-story facility to optimize communications coverage, allowing users to freely roam within the coverage area without losing connection. Overall, the full-

featured CellCom wireless system added enormous value, enabling Alley Theatre to achieve their objectives and improve their productions in a way that would further differentiate them.



Application Diagram

Many of their staff continued to make use of Clear-Com’s Encore main station, RS-500 Series wired beltacks, and speaker stations to share information including the video board operator, spotlight operator, lighting board operator, video designer, sound designer, lighting designer, technical director, master electrician, lighting supervisor, FOH sound engineer, production manager, stage manager and backstage deck crew.

The assistant stage managers and backstage deck crew, which are always moving, relied on CellCom to converse with each other as well as those with wired beltacks. Likewise, the wardrobe supervisor, costume shop manager, and wardrobe crew are connected to everyone else, but also have a private channel of communication via CellCom. Additionally, the deck electrician used CellCom for information exchange with the lighting and sound operators. From team-wide paging announcements to restricted conversations as well as from rehearsal to performance, Clear-Com made it possible for them to collaborate closely and successfully execute productions.

## Business Results

### Improved teamwork and collaboration

The CellCom wireless beltacks have extended communications capability to every corner of the Alley Theatre facility. By being much more connected, information flowed easier so that responsibilities could be carried out without delay.

“The range that CellCom provides is wonderful. Whether the crew needs to communicate with the stage manager from the dressing rooms, the green room, and backstage or in the front of house in either theatre, we’re guaranteed to be covered,” says Dupree.

### **Flexible systems accelerate issue resolution**

The CellCom Configuration Editor, which is part of the CellCom Toolkit software, enables ultra-fast configuration as well as complete management of the CellCom wireless system. Volume adjustments, key assignments, and real-time label applications for CellCom wireless beltacks can be performed carte blanche from the CellCom base station or any computer with the software over IP. Dupree states, “We can easily create partylines or reroute how the wireless system interfaces with the wired unit very quickly and efficiently through the CellCom software.” Because of this added flexibility, the Alley Theatre team is more prepared to respond to production changes or emergencies.

### **Create a more efficient work environment with better coverage**

Every major challenge from their previous wireless intercoms was resolved by the CellCom wireless beltacks and chargers. Dupree identifies the tremendous benefits of having the CellCom chargers, “We appreciate the ease with which we can recharge the beltacks through the integrated charging stations or plug-in cords. It saves time and money and is great for the environment.” Since the CellCom plug chargers are placed by the sound console and throughout the backstage area, users can conveniently connect their beltacks to the plug chargers without having to remove the battery pack, headset or cover. Further, the CellCom battery pack charger allows them to have extra battery packs charged and ready to go whenever they are needed.

In addition, CellCom’s unique DECT operations in the license-free 1.92-1.93 GHz band offered dependable, interference-free communications from the production’s start to finish. “We love how the frequencies that CellCom uses are in the 1.9GHz band, far away from any of our and other’s equipment, making the system more reliable and less prone to reception issues,” claims Dupree. “The reception and sound quality of the CellCom beltacks are absolutely fantastic with the audio coming through very, very clearly. They are much better than the audio quality of other wireless communication products.” Evidently, Clear-Com dramatically transformed the Alley Theatre’s work culture by eliminating the burden of frequency coordination and allowing them to have a peace of mind even when other venues were using wireless devices.

### **Complete, future-proof communications infrastructure**

CellCom, a powerful and expandable wireless intercom system, offered more than enough capability for their escalating production requirements. CellCom supported up to 20 wireless beltacks and seamlessly interfaced not only with Alley Theatre’s existing wired and wireless systems, but could be extended through integration with any new technologies. Instead of having to purchase multiple wireless systems, CellCom alone was sufficient.

“CellCom was really the only viable, value-added product available that would allow at least 10 beltacks to operate in both of our playing spaces. This was no small feat since the two areas are in completely different parts of the complex,” says Dupree. “It also permitted us to build upon our past investments since we were able to link it with our wired Clear-Com system.”

All in all, with greater control over their communications, the Alley Theatre team is better equipped to design, create and manage productions. Clear-Com’s intercom systems improved production delivery and quality on every level, giving the audience at Alley Theatre the greatest opportunity to truly appreciate artistic excellence.



**Americas and Asia-Pacific Headquarters**

California, United States

Tel: +1.510.337.6600

Email: [SalesSupportUS@clearcom.com](mailto:SalesSupportUS@clearcom.com)

[www.clearcom.com](http://www.clearcom.com)

**Europe, Middle East, and Africa Headquarters**

Cambridge, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 1223 815000

Email: [SalesSupportEMEA@clearcom.com](mailto:SalesSupportEMEA@clearcom.com)

**China Office**

Beijing Representative Office

Tel: +86-10-65811360/65815577

Copyright © 2011 Clear-Com, LLC. All rights reserved. ®Clear-Com, the Clear-Com Logo, Encore and CellCom are trademarks or registered trademarks of HM Electronics, Inc.