

The Sunset Wire

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Working with an A/V Consultant

In this world of rapidly changing technology, audiovisual design engineering can be a powerful asset to architects and designers working in the corporate arena.

It's impossible to do business today without understanding how to take full advantage of all of the multi-media options available.

Working with an audiovisual engineer can take some of the pressure off of designers and architects because of their highly specialized knowledge of technology and user related concerns. If you are in the process of designing a project that requires audiovisual systems, here are some ways to determine what kind of specialist you need.

To Design/Consult or....

Design Consulting vs. Design/ Build

If you are already working with a construction firm that has experience in building high-tech audiovisual systems, you may consider using an AV design consulting company to assist in laying out the system and preparing a budget.

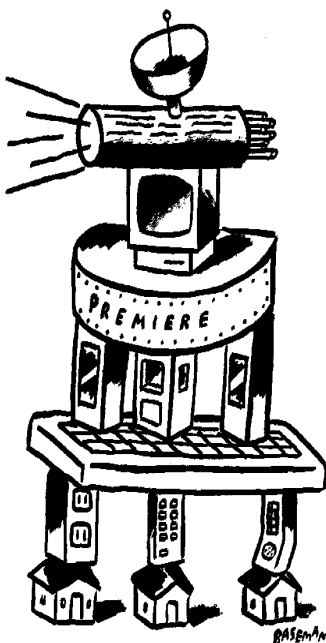
Sometimes your General Contractor or Engineering firm will have a specialist on staff, but often the architect or designer must bring someone in on a consulting basis.

This person works closely with both the Architect and the client to ask appropriate questions, gather the requisite information, and implement the blueprint

design using a CAD format useable by the design team.

The A/V consultant should be a specialist in the writing of bid specifications. The resulting work can then be integrated into the architect's blueprint set so that the GC can bid-out the properly located conduit, outlets, and framing. In addition, the equipment & installation can be competitively bid to assure the best price on a turn-key A/V system.

A/V terminology is very specialized, as are many of the different industries using A/V systems. The A/V consultant needs to clearly understand and be able to address any industry-specific concerns.



...or to Design/ Build

If your resources are limited, or if the client needs direction, trade organizations such as the National Systems Contractors Association (NSCA) are available to direct you to competent audiovisual system integrators/consultants, i.e. Design/Builders, in your area.

Selecting a consulting company frees you from worrying about some of the more specialized aspects of AV design with regards to compatibility with developing technology. You might hear “you can’t design for what you do not know”, which is true. But the impact of the lack of standards within the electronics industry can be minimized with proper design

planning and vision as to the future use of the particular spaces or systems.

It makes sense for a variety of reasons to hire a firm that is responsible for the design, budgeting and installation of a project. The initial engagement requires the A/V firm first interview the “user” clients regarding their needs, then interview the architect and designer to find out what their requirements and other conditions within the job space might be. If the scope of work is clear, and the users are specific about their needs, the Design/Build engagement will save money in the negotiated costs of defining the project.

Budgeting, Aesthetics and Performance Standards

The job of engineering and budgeting audiovisual systems is a time-consuming and detailed process. The scope of a consulting design for bid is much more copious in documentation on the front end, hence much more expensive than the negotiated price of a complete design-build engagement.

Today, the role of the audiovisual companies seeking design/ build engagements go beyond the work of equipment installation.

Audiovisual designers need to assist the other team members such as the Interior Designer in other areas as well. Offering solutions that fit and flow within the aesthetic requirements of the spaces is

fundamental these days.

Working with the Design team members, installation companies need to be versed in ways to obscure the appearance of the A/V components.

Overall the negotiated Design/ Build approach to system integration can be a tremendous money savings device, but will require some combination of the Client, Project Manager, Designer or Architect to have a level of experience and comfort with the Design/ Build Installation company. Don’t hesitate to check references.

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Conclusion

Probably most important overall, performance standards are an aspect of audiovisual system design and engineering that should be clearly outlined. It is important for the client to have more than just trust in the results of the audiovisual engineering and installation process.

Whether you are using Design/Consulting or negotiated Design/Build, the process of selecting the appropriate candidate is extremely important. This is invariably a relationship that will continue for the duration of the project — in the case of Design/Build, at least a warranty period of a year or longer.

Check the candidate's past work reputation. Don't be afraid to explore all of the options covered in the length of the warranty period, as well as the costs associated with an extended warranty period and maintenance contract relationship.

Do not hesitate to request references or ask to review the documentation developed for previous jobs. These are steps that will help you decide whose product and services to buy, and what in fact you will be receiving in return for your investment.

About Sunset Studios

Sunset Studios has been a valuable team player and asset to many projects, working with some of the most distinguished architectural and design firms in the world. We do both Design/Consult and Design/Build projects, and we have been responsible for some of the most elegant state-of-the-art facilities in the Los Angeles area, including the Warner Brothers Television Multimedia Focus Room and the Bacara Resort & Spa in Santa Barbara.

For more information, or call us at 310-277-0901. We look forward to talking to you about how we can help translate your clients' dreams into 21st century reality.

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