

SELECTING YOUR COMMUNICATION DEVICE: SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

by Judith Fillips

Once you have determined the type of communication device your installation requires – intercom or telephone or some combination – the selection process may be delegated to the purchasing department or, for smaller companies, to one of the owners.

Many companies consider just three things when selecting a communications system:

- ◆ It meets the code.
- ◆ It meets the specs.
- ◆ It's affordable.

Ease of installation would be a distant fourth for most companies, unless they are among those who track their installation time in the total cost. Evaluation of communication systems and technical equipment can be a daunting process if good procedures are not in place. Most companies have someone on staff who is conversant with codes and can check for equipment compliance with the code. However, an adjuster or experienced installer can make some determination of equipment quality by observation. Failure to utilize the knowledge and experience of mechanics is a mistake many companies make, choosing to keep them working instead of drawing on hard-won expertise to avoid problems.

Evaluating Communications Systems

- ◆ Will the supplier ship you a unit to examine? (You may need to issue a purchase order.)
- ◆ Does the equipment appear well made?
- ◆ Are the materials solid or flimsy?
- ◆ Are the prints and instructions clear, or will they generate time-consuming confusion in the field?
- ◆ Is there a good correlation between the prints and the unit?
- ◆ Are there mounting holes, or do they need to be field drilled?
- ◆ Is the box large enough for wiring and for access to parts and mounting holes?
- ◆ Does the pattern of mounting holes make installing easy?
- ◆ Is there enough room in the box for a wiring loop?
- ◆ Are terminal strips located where they're easy to access and wire?
- ◆ Is special (expensive) wiring required, such as twisted shielded pairs or coaxial cable?
- ◆ Can the communications device be easily adapted to mounting in a custom lobby or firefighters' panel?
- ◆ Does the supplier provide technical support?
- ◆ Does the product have a warranty? What are its terms?
- ◆ Have any of your company's branch offices used it?

- ◆ Check satisfied customers – ask for names and phone numbers.

Tips for Building Owners to Consider

- ◆ Will the installing company also be responsible for the maintenance?
- ◆ Does your total maintenance contract exclude some things, such as communications devices?

Once you have selected and installed a communications device, take the time to do a post-installation evaluation/interview that can help save time and money on the next project. Did the equipment perform as promoted? Did it fit? Were there installation problems, and was technical support required? Was it helpful? Were the prints easy to understand? Did it work? How did it sound? How did it look? Was the customer happy?

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