

Tips on Working with Trades

Editor's note: Jack Borenstein, president of Ultimate Sound and Installation in Long Island City, N.Y., knows a bit about working with subcontractors. As a general contractor in his early years doing plumbing, carpentry, electrical, marble, tile and window shades, he developed skills that he applies to working with other trades as an integrator. He says that knowing how things are built helps him to understand the flow of the other people's work. Meanwhile, lack of knowledge about custom installation often leads to integrators not getting the respect they deserve on the job-site. In any case, however, projects only come together when the trades work together. Borenstein provides some tips, as a dealer who has successfully established real partnerships with builders, architects, designers and other trades.

Ask the other trades to reciprocate by providing a list of equipment, schedules, wiring diagrams and spec sheets.

Under-promise and over-deliver—Don't create drama or problems. Be the "can-do" guy. Offer solutions to questions or problems, but know what you're talking about. Before you say, "yes," do your research and due diligence. Check with more than one manufacturer or engineer about whether or not you can bend the rules of physics. It may be easier for the general contractor to install that in-wall subwoofer without the big rough-in box, but it might cause a problem for the clients' next-door neighbor because the bass is leaking into his space. You certainly do not want to go in there later to announce that they now need to install a 65-inch x 14-inch rough-in box after they just spent \$20,000 faux-finishing the wall.

Show and tell—Pictures, drawings and spec sheets help tradesmen to understand what you are doing and what you are asking them to do for you.

Create sample GUI templates and discuss the functionality and flow of the system up front. Get approvals and have them sign off on the plan early before you start programming and installing. Keep copies and take pictures as backup, just in case.

Be professional—Do not just verbally tell the electrician, general contractor, architect or design-

er what you want done. Don't write the design or plan on bar napkins. Take the time to prepare a drawing that fully shows and explains what you want done. Now, it's a job



document. It's also a good way of checking yourself that you haven't made a mistake or left anything out such as a pre-wire for the subwoofer.

Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, when everybody is throwing 50 things at you, it's easy to forget something. Putting it down on paper is also great for the next job. Just cut and paste. (Just make sure you change the project name.) Keep copies for your "Job Binder" so if and when you need to prove something, perhaps in a court of law, you're covered.

Also, ask the other trades to reciprocate by providing a list of equipment, schedules, wiring diagrams and spec sheets so you know what products you need to integrate and control. You need to know communication protocols, native capabilities, counts and schedules before you can plan and commit to system functionality or deadlines.

Educate—The more you teach the other trades, the more they will trust and rely upon you. If the architect and interior designer feel you're not just out to sell the client as much as you can, they will feel more comfortable recommending you to present and future clients. Hopefully, they'll bring you into the projects during the design stage so you have plenty of time to devote to it instead of after the walls are all closed-up.

Remember, in the end the architect and designer don't really care what control system is in the closet. They want to deliver a high-quality, reliable, cost-effective solution for their clients. If you can add value and make their job easier, you will have a partner for life.



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