

Let it fly

By Andrew T. Martin

Here are the most important things a contractor needs to consider to ensure a safe and successful sound-system rigging.

A sound contractor routinely deals with numerous challenges during a typical installation. But only one area of the professional installer's marketplace is all too often the cause of unnecessary risks and cost overruns: loudspeaker rigging.

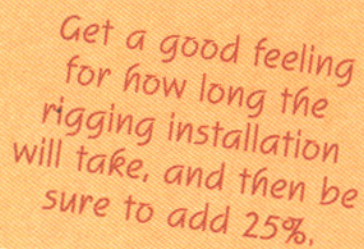
For the sound contractor, only the unavoidable risks should be taken. When considering the litigious nature of today's business and public sectors, a contractor cannot be too careful when suspending equipment over peoples' heads. Several steps can minimize the sound contractor's risk, yet still maintain a cost-effective installation.

Bidding the job — preparation will save you from failure

Bidding a project often starts with the evaluation of a consulting firm's specification. Although consulting firms typically do an excellent job with electronics, loudspeakers and system configurations, the information provided on the loudspeaker rigging system is often remiss. Do not accept vague answers or noncommittal responses. Not only is it the professional responsibility of the consultant to provide specific guidelines pertaining to the rigging system and hardware type, it is also always in the consultant's best legal interests.

At a minimum, a clause should state working load limits, product traceability, structural analysis, design characteristics and a loud-

speaker-cluster model with the enclosures in free air space. Without this basic information, an educated quote cannot be generated, and therefore the rigging hardware should not be quoted. A quote based



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on non-existent information shall certainly cost the contractor the loss of integrity and a great deal of money and could result in extremely expensive rebuilds, lawsuits or criminal charges.

Above all else, you must quote only products designed for overhead suspension. Contact a credible rigging manufacturer to get a package quote. If you intend to quote a custom rigging hardware system, don't forget to include the cost of product liability insurance, product traceability, structural engineering and fabrication costs by a company with a large product liability policy willing to name your company as additionally insured for the lifetime of the product.

Before bidding the job, contact the rigging manufacturers and loudspeaker manufacturers. Often certain options will reduce the cost of the loudspeaker cluster instal-

lation, or, conversely, a specific and costly option might be required when the loudspeakers are suspended. In either case, the manufacturers can help the contractor match the best equipment to the right application.

Always call upon your experience and the experience of others in the business. Network with a similar noncompeting company in another part of the country. While you do this, remember that the legal climate of today is quite different than that of 10 years ago.

Manufacturers are another good place to look for advice on rigging experience. A contractor with limited rigging experience should not pursue large-scale rigging projects because of the complicated nature of rigging expenses and the high labor costs of specialized installers. Rigging is a specialized and dangerous profession, and certain installation requirements can drive labor costs high.

Contact a rigging labor company in the geographical area of the job site to get an idea of the labor expenses for the installation before sending off the quote. A simple 10-minute phone call can save a contractor thousands of dollars.

Another labor-cost tip: Get a good feeling for how long the rigging installation will take, then add 25% to it. Rigging is one of those areas that almost always holds surprises for the contractor and almost always takes longer than expected.

Several regulatory agencies might have jurisdiction over the project. The obvious are the local, state and federal governments. How-

Martin is president of ATM Fly-Ware, Carson, CA.