

Selecting a Systems Integrator

Questions to ask before making that critical choice

As in any profession or industry, there are good people and companies as well as not so good ones. Here are some tips for selecting the right systems integrator on your next project. These basic questions can help you improve your chances of making a good choice:

- How long has the integrator been in business?
- Is the integrator licensed and registered within the state where the work is being performed?
- Does the firm have insurance? Ask for copies of the integrator's insurance coverage and make sure the coverage is current. Integrators should have general liability, worker's compensation, and property damage coverage.
- How many projects like yours has the integrator done? Ask for a list.
- What kind of certifications do the technicians doing the work hold? What about the installers?
- Are specific licenses required for this type of work in your state? Do the company's employees have them? Be suspicious if they say none are required.
- Ask for a list of references. Get names, addresses, and phone numbers of at least three references. Speak with the references and go see the jobs.
- Ask if the integrator will be hiring any subcontractors for work such as running wires or installing conduit. If so, meet them and check their insurance and licenses. The primary contractor must pay them on time, or they could put a lien on your facility. Protect yourself by asking the integrator on a regular basis if they have paid every subcontractor and supplier. At the end of the project, ask for a lien release or lien waiver.

More than anything else, ask the company you're interviewing if you can meet with the project manager they would use on your job. Trained and experienced managers are probably even more important than the equipment you purchase. They can explain the company's documentation procedures, payment schedules, sign-off procedures, subcontractor agreements, and the other work processes you can expect.

This process alone will shed light on the decision-making process. With complicated technology and hundreds of product specifications and details to understand, it can be overwhelming. Looking at the way a company provides project management will help you separate the right company from the others. If price, products, and reputation all seem to be equal, use this as a determining factor to select the right company. For a list of integrators in your area visit www.nasca.org/directory.

By Chuck Wilson



Chuck Wilson is the Executive Director of NSCA. The NSCA is a leading not-for-profit association representing the commercial electronic systems industry. With a slate of more than 2,500 member companies worldwide, the National Systems Contractors Association is a powerful advocate of all who work within the low-voltage industry, including systems contractors/integrators, product manufacturers, consultants, sales representatives, architects, specifying engineers, and other allied professionals (www.nasca.org)