

Evaluating an A/V Design Consultant

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Many people claim to be “consultants.” While this group clearly does include skilled independent consultants, it also, unfortunately, contains others who may not provide the same level or quality of service – including some well-meaning amateurs. The waters are muddied further by manufacturers, vendors, and contractors claiming to offer ‘consulting services’ – these all have a clear conflict of interest. This checklist will help you evaluate a prospective audio visual design consultant.

Is the consultant independent of all contractors and vendors? YES NO

It is vital that your consultant be completely independent. Some vendors and contractors will offer “consulting” or design services, and some “consultants” will sell or fabricate products or perform installation services – **BEWARE!**

- Anyone who sells equipment has a vested interest in selling **certain** products. *Your audio visual consultant should select products and technologies that are in your best interest – not theirs.*
- No one who performs installation services is in a position to objectively review the quality of the installation, or perform acceptance on the installed system – they are certainly not in a position to identify and track deficiencies. There is no protection against product substitutions, unapproved design changes, or sub-standard workmanship. While a contract installer may be a person of integrity, they are also human. When placed under a high-pressure deadline, they may cut corners. When they discover they have underestimated the time and resources (this inevitably happens), they may try to cut back wherever they can to save.

Does the consultant have industry certification? YES NO

As with architects and engineers, audio visual design consultants should be certified by a recognized industry body such as **ICIA** (International Communication Industries Association). Specifically, ICIA has a [CTS-D certification \(Certified Technology Specialist – Design\)](#). To obtain this certification, a consultant must have demonstrated in-depth knowledge of audio visual systems design during a two-day onsite testing session which includes written, oral, and hands-on examination. The consultant must periodically re-certify either by re-testing, or through teaching or attending a certain number of hours of accredited industry workshops and seminars. This certification assures you that the consultant is a trained professional in the field of audio visual system design. *Is your prospective consultant certified by an independent, industry-recognized body?*

Is the consultant a member of appropriate professional associations? YES NO

Membership in a professional association indicates that your consultant takes their job and profession seriously. These associations provide a means for members to continually upgrade their professional skills. Many have stringent membership requirements, and a code of professional ethics which the member must subscribe to. Examples of such associations are: [IEEE \(Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers\)](#); [AES \(Audio Engineering Society\)](#); [SMPTE \(Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers\)](#); and [ICIA \(International Communication Industries Association\)](#). *Is your prospective consultant a member in good standing of the appropriate professional associations?.*

Does the consultant provide high-quality professional drawings? YES NO

A proper design and specification includes professional drawings. When it comes to conveying the intent of a design, the saying “*a picture is worth a thousand words*” has never been truer! Some A/V consultants don’t bother with drawings, some produce hand-drawn sketches, while others provide professional CAD drawings produced to international standards. Drawings should be produced in the **AutoCAD** standard format for easy interchange with architects and engineers. *Ask to see samples of your prospective consultant’s drawings from previous projects.*

Does the consultant’s documentation meet standards? YES NO

Technical specifications should be produced to established standards to ensure the most efficient transfer of information. In a bidding situation, it is important that all specifications be in the three-part CSI/CSC (or equivalent international) format. *Ask your prospective consultant what format they use for their specifications, and ask to see samples of specifications from previous projects.*

Is the consultant familiar with bidding practices? YES NO

If your project is going out for bid (always a wise course of action), is the consultant familiar enough with bidding to guide you through the intricacies of the bidding process? Can your consultant prepare a front-end bid package and advise on supplementary conditions to the contract? *Ask your prospective consultant what to do if you receive only a single bid. Ask them what the procedure is if all bids received are over your budget.*

Is the consultant familiar with disability requirements? YES NO

In the U.S., the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) **requires** public venues (such as museums, planetariums, attractions, etc.) to accommodate persons with disabilities. Non-compliance can result in very high costs. Other countries have similar regulations in effect or pending. *Ensure that your audio visual consultant is familiar with hearing assist systems, captioning, visual alarms and annunciators, and similar technologies to aid the disabled.*

Does the consultant carry professional insurance? YES NO

Errors & Omissions Insurance: What protection do you have if flaws in the consultant’s design result in third-party liability? A professional design consultant will *always* carry **Errors and Omissions Insurance**. If a consultant you are considering hiring does not normally carry this insurance or, worse, cannot obtain it, *you should wonder why.*

Extended Medical Coverage: Your consultant will be reviewing contractor’s work while your project is a construction site. The consultant is not an employee, and your Worker’s Compensation coverage will not normally apply. Does the consultant have sufficient medical coverage to pay for a work-related accident, *or could you become liable?*

Does the consultant implement a disaster recovery program? YES NO

Your consultant's offices may be burglarised or destroyed by fire or similar catastrophe. What provisions has your consultant made to re-constitute your project drawings and documentation? A professional design consultant will backup all client data files to a secure off-site server on a daily basis – preferably located in another city. *Ask your consultant how they are protecting your project data in the event of a disaster.*

Does the consultant offer a full-range of services?

___ YES ___ NO

A project requiring audio, video, projection, and control components typically requires more than just system design. Your audio visual design consultant should also be able to:

- Prepare an accurate budget estimate of the *installed* systems in advance of bidding.
- Provide electrical, conduit, and mechanical requirements to the project engineers.
- Prepare or advise on front-end bid documents and construction contracts.
- Write a detailed technical specification that can be included in an overall project bid package or serve as a stand-alone document.
- Pre-qualify prospective bidders and evaluate bids – *this is where it is vital that your A/V consultant be independent of manufacturers, contractors, and vendors or else a clear conflict of interest exists.*
- Review on-site installation, and solve arising technical problems and perform acceptance testing on your behalf – *how else will you know if the contractor's work is complete, up to spec, and performed to required standards of workmanship?*
- Provide technical project management and contract administration services for large projects.

Ask for a listing of your prospective consultant's capabilities and typical project methodology.

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