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The IT cabling infrastructure
division of
e-Ready Building Limited

The IT cabling consultants

e-Ready Building Limited
Next generation IT infrastructures

LOVE ME TENDER, (LOVE ME TRUE), ALL MY DREAMS FULFILL by Mike Gilmore, Technical Director of the FIA for Networking+ (June 2007)

The quality of tenders and the responses to them are a common source of complaint amongst installers, consultant and their clients. This has, of course, been going on for years. I remember huge tenders for telecommunications infrastructures, at least in terms of the pages they comprised, that were issued in the 1980s which detailed every last metre of trench to be dug and every floor tile to be lifted but then simply asked for "a fibre optic backbone". The reason for such mismatches between the practical and the technical in those days was quite simple - quantity surveyors and their like did not know how to specify the cabling so they focussed on items they could understand and control and hoped for assistance for everything else. It would be nice to think that such tenders were issued to caring installers would provide a technically appropriate bid which would allow an effective adjudication - and from memory this did happen, in the main.

The current situation is quite different. Today, many of those responsible for the development of tender documents tend to stand behind the published standards using them as either a barrier or a shield. Unfortunately there are many cabling standards, each one valid in its own way, to cover everything from the performance of components, infrastructure design (which components and where they go), infrastructure planning and installation and, finally, the commissioning of the end result. And although there are many standards they frequently conflict with each other or are found to be inappropriate for the application or nation in which they are quoted. The best example of these is ANSI/TIA/EIA-568-B - which is a very effective standard for the specification of telecommunication cabling design. However, a statement such as "provide cabling in accordance with ANSI/TIA/EIA-568-B" cannot be applied in the UK since the standard demands installation practices which are incompatible with other primary UK standards such as BS 7671: 16th Edition of the Electrical Wiring Regulations.

Certain non-UK based, but international, industry bodies that provide "industry qualifications" such as BICSI recognise these facts stating that "at all times, a designer is responsible for knowing the local standards and codes that apply". Unfortunately, this knowledge is not assessed. The FIA White Paper covering its relationship with BICSI addresses this specific issue (www.fia-online.co.uk/pdf/Whites/wp0307.pdf).

As a result the FIA is seriously considering a UK qualification which is targeted at those both creating tenders and responding to them. The qualification has the working title of "Specification of telecommunications infrastructure installations" and is being developed with a view to acceptance by City & Guilds or Open College Network organisations.

The principle purposes of this qualification are twofold. One key outcome is to ensure that those preparing tenders are able to understand the potential incompatibilities between the standards that they choose to reference for components, design and commissioning while highlighting the existence and contents of the applicable planning and installation. The other outcome is to teach those responding to tenders the correct forms of response when tenders are badly written - in order to minimise contractual difficulties, legal disputes etc. It should be highlighted that this qualification is not restricted to optical fibre - it will be written to apply to all telecommunications cabling technologies.

The development work for this qualification is only just beginning but is not expected to involve a lengthy gestation. If any readers are interested in either undertaking the qualification or becoming involved in its development then they should contact either the FIA Technical Director (mike.gilmore@btinternet.com) or the FIA Qualification Director (john@lucidos.co.uk).

If you wish to access the resources provided by the FIA go to www.fia-online.co.uk. Enquiries can be e-mailed to jane@fiasec.demon.co.uk, or, alternatively, you can contact the FIA Secretariat in 01763 273039.

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Biography

As the Technical and Standards Director of the UK Fibreoptic Industry Association, Mike is heavily involved in the development of training and competence standards for the fibre installation industry and sets down policy in this area. In addition he chairs the audit and arbitration committees for the FIA. His book "Fibre optic cabling; theory design and installation practice" published in 1991 remains a reference for both experts and entrants into this field.

In the UK, Mike is Chairman of TCT/7, the BSI technical committee responsible for the three panels on telecommunication cabling. He also chairs two of these panels (TCT7/-/1 and TCT7/-/3). TCT7/-/1 acts to assist development of European and international standards for telecommunications cabling. TCT7/-/3 manages the implementation of European standards and others in the UK.

At the European level Mike is Convenor of CENELEC TC215 Working Group 1, the group that controls the development of European standards for the design and installation of telecommunications cabling.

At international level, Mike is Convenor of the Cabling Implementation Task Group (CITG) within ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3. This group is responsible for the strategic management of the international standards covering the specification, QA, installation, administration, operation, maintenance and repair of generic cabling. This work supports all the cabling design standards produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 including ISO/IEC 11801 and ISO/IEC 24702 for industrial premises produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 IPTG (also convened by Mike Gilmore).

Mike is a regular speaker at seminars and conferences in all five continents. He has provided the keynote address and opening presentation in many conferences in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. His seminars, providing regular updates on the progression of cabling standards are particularly well attended and are operating in the UK and continental Europe.



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