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See last page for biographical details



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Next generation IT infrastructures

AT LAST! - INTEGRATED CABLING STANDARDS

THE END OF SUPPLIER WARRANTIES?

by
Mike Gilmore, Technical Director of the FIA

for Networking+ (November 2006)

The new European structured cabling design standards for offices, homes and data centres were approved for publication in November and are expected to be published as British Standards with the next two months. These design standards go far beyond their predecessors in that they mandate the use of installation practices according to existing British Standards.

For customers and their consultants this makes life very easy indeed. In future, if you ask for cabling in accordance with BS EN 50173-2 for your new office block or corporate headquarters you are not only defining the component choice and configuration rules - you are stating a requirement for installation quality assurance as well.

This has a number of not-so-obvious but nevertheless welcome effects.

One of these effects is that many well-known system suppliers, who for years have taken little interest in installation standards (because they have had their own), have suddenly woken up. They are now very keen to ensure that what the installation standards require or recommend actually matches their internal procedures (or vice versa). This is great news for the future of installation standard compliance at the high-end of the market and will inevitably have a trickle-down effect.

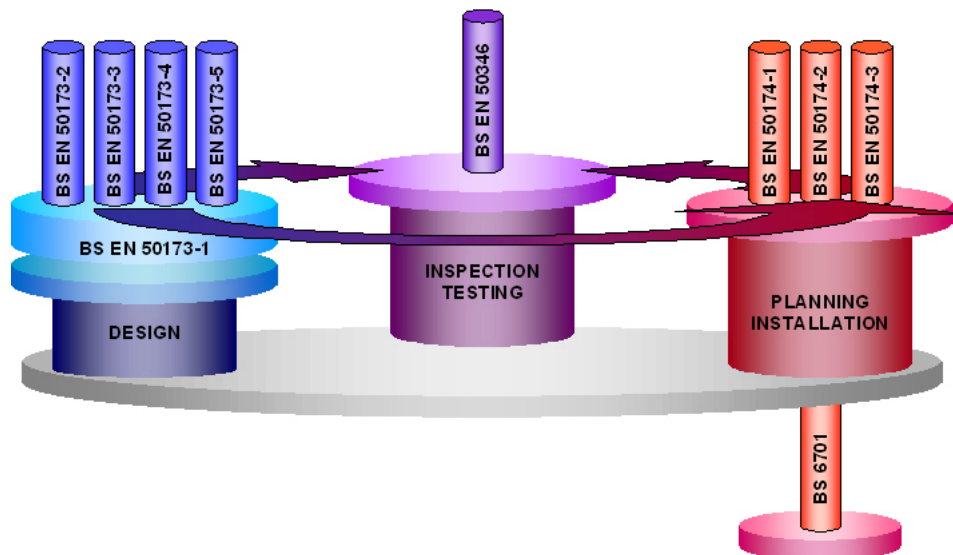
Another of these effects will be re-focussing of the meaning of installer competence. Unless installers qualifications are based on the relevant British (or European) standards they are of no obvious benefit under contract.

The seemingly minor change in the meaning of conformance to the BS EN 50173 series of standards also calls into question the value of cabling system supplier warranties. For the last fifteen years, cabling systems have been supplied with a variety of warranties ranging from all encompassing end-to-end "channel" guarantees at the top-end of the market, via the more straightforward "link warranties" to the most basic component warranties. They have all come under fire at some point - usually when something goes wrong and the customer is unhappy.

With the publication of the new European cabling design standards, the justification of warranties is once more under the spotlight. Put simply the question is this - if a tender document demands conformance to, lets say, BS EN 50173-2 which defines the cabling performance specification and its configuration - and now the installation quality assurance and practices as well - what is the supplier warranty for?

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The integrated approach to the implementation structured cabling

Over the past few weeks the FIA Technical Directorate has been reviewing a range of warranties from suppliers across the structured cabling spectrum - both for copper and optical fibre cabling. We have reviewed the requirements of those warranties in terms of their scope, their demands for standards compliance, procedures for installer approval and requirements and evidence of installer training. It has not been a very edifying process.

In order to try to shed some light on the situation the FIA is launching a White Paper on the subject of cabling system supplier warranties. It provides a clinical assessment of the key features of the different types of warranties thereby allowing the client to clearly understand what is on offer. It should be published by the time you read this article - go to www.fia-online.co.uk/epaper-tech.htm to find about more about FIA White Papers.

Our review of supplier warranties is wholly in line with the latest changes to the standards. It integrates seamlessly into the Mk.II FIA Approved Installer Scheme that was launched in September this year - the principal aim of which is to minimise risk, both for the installer and the customer alike. Full details of the FIA Approved Installer Scheme are available at www.fia-online.co.uk/eais01.htm

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. In the international arena Mike is Convenor of ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 IPTG, a standards committee working on generic cabling for industrial premises (ISO/IEC 24702).

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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