



Noises off! The key to a successful project is all people involved understand their role

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Almost everything changed last year and it felt like it hit all at once. Yet, we still have deadlines to meet, we still have to justify our prices and we need to be doing things more efficiently. There are so many aspects to a design project that are crucial to its profitability and success. A design project is very much like a play with a whole cast of characters and different acts. I am sure many of you have seen comedies like Noises Off where the cast is running around crazy and its complete madness which is what makes it entertaining. Design projects in this state are not so funny. In fact they are probably so far into the red; everyone is depressed and can't wait until it's over. The key to the success of the project is all person(s) involved understand their role, where to be and when to deliver.

ACT I Programming and Schematic Design

Now that the audition stage or RFP/presentation is over, its time for the opening act which is the programming or pre-design phase of the project. Think of the client goals as the theme of the project. If the audience or in this case the client, becomes confused or lost, chances are this will not become an enjoyable experience for anybody. In our experience, almost all un-pleasantries are born during this phase of the project which is why we are adamant about early involvement in all of our projects. Especially from a client perspective, you never want specific design professionals speaking on behalf of other design professionals. That's madness. For example, you would not want your MEP engineer making architectural decisions and vice versa. The only way to avoid these situations is to have all design professionals involved early. As an MEP engineer, we will be evaluating code compliance, initiating contact with utilities and fire marshal and of course meeting with the rest of the cast/design team to coordinate the mechanical and electrical layout for this project keeping in mind the project goals, specifically the budget and the schedule. To close out the opening act, we move into the schematic phase where we begin the preliminary design and it's crucial all cast members communicate strategy, design criteria and design standards. Act I closes and everyone applauds.

ACT II - Design Development and Construction Documents

Curtain goes up, time for the next act. As the project moves into DD, the drawings and documents become more detailed while incorporating the comments of the design team and the client. Open lines of communication are important for any project and in this phase it's especially true. Before this phase is over, we will be refining the drawings with finalized locations for mechanical and electrical equipment indentifying the sizes and capacities. In order to avoid delays in the schedule, it's very important this portion of the project progresses smoothly so we can file these drawings with the building departments and appropriate agencies where delays can be substantial if not handled properly.

After we receive approvals from the building departments and appropriate agencies, a final set of construction documents including specifications that detail the construction requirements is produced. All cast members are involved to perform a final review and Act II officially closes setting the stage for the big finale.

ACT III - Bid Phase and Construction

As the curtain rises, and almost all project phases complete, it's time to bring it all together. During the bid phases, it's important for the MEP engineering to help this process move effectively by responding to bidder's questions and issuing addenda for clarification as required. Of course considering value engineering recommendations is important as well.

Once all appropriate firms have been selected, the project now enters the final number in the act; time to build this masterpiece. It's important for the MEP engineer during this phase to efficiently review shop drawings (and reject ones that do not meet the project standards) as well as attending an appropriate number of meetings during the construction phases to ensure all design components are being installed correctly. A project killer for MEP engineers is change orders during construction. This creates headaches for everyone eventually and it's best to avoid this nightmare by keeping involved early and throughout.

Now that the project has been successfully designed and masterfully built, it's time for the curtain calls; the ribbon cutting ceremony with all cast members present. The show has ended, and everyone takes a final bow.

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