

AV Industry Training

The risks of having a non-educated workforce.

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“I’m a firm believer that if you educate your staff they won’t want to leave”

THE AV INTEGRATOR industry continues to move ahead at a cracking pace, but training isn’t keeping up. Training is often the first thing to be shelved, side-lined and put on the back burner when times get tough or when there are just not enough hours in the day to keep customers happy. Yet every AV integration firm, without fail, manages to pride themselves on the ‘training’ they offer to their employees. So if the training being provided is so good, why are companies finding it so difficult to retain staff or indeed attract them from other industries in the first place?

If you are a business owner, then your primary concern is your bottom line, and I doubt any fair-minded employee would contest that. However, I struggle to understand how many business owners are willing to use their clients’ projects as a beta testing ground. Surely the cost of sending your staff to selected training courses throughout the year is significantly less than the cost of return visits to a customer’s premises to fix up problems directly attributed to poor workmanship?

The subject of industry training has been a topic of constant argument, and it’s not something that will be solved overnight. In fact, the training debate raises more questions than answers. I won’t pretend to give you all the answers, but I have some points for you to consider.

ON THE RIGHT COURSE?

Do we have the course content that is relevant to what we do?: For an unregulated industry, I believe we have an offering to satisfy almost all requirements of an AV integration company. In the commercial arena, InfoComm has a raft of

courses covering management, design and installation. Admittedly, these courses aren’t run in Australia and New Zealand with anywhere near the frequency of, say, North America, but when the courses *are* run, the attendance is, quite frankly, abysmal. I know this, because the last course I was scheduled to teach had to be cancelled.

Aside from industry training, there is certainly no shortage of manufacturer-based training. Often these courses are free of charge and this often leads to no-shows because the attendee perceives that if it’s free, it won’t matter if they miss it because ‘something has come up’. Perhaps manufacturer courses shouldn’t be gratis – this is something that should probably be explored.

On the subject of relevance, there are a committed group of volunteers who have been working to regionalise (‘de-Americanize’) the content of the InfoComm courses run here in Australia. These volunteers are made up of integrators and consultants who have a vested interest in the quality of work they charge very good money for. They’re guided by staff instructors from InfoComm. If you think you can make a difference, don’t be backward in coming forward!

Is there a defined career path and what is the goal?: The short answer is no, and it will be a while before you can sign up to a TAFE course to do ‘Systems Integration’. It’s certainly not through lack of effort; it’s more about lack of funds.

What the industry does have is an ANSI-accredited certification (InfoComm CTS). At the very least, it’s a great start. I am seeing tenders being released more often with references to ‘CTS certified installers’, so whether you like or not, a minimum benchmark is better than no benchmark.

We also have a level of licensure (ACA Cabling Provider Rules) that is, in my opinion, not policed anywhere near enough. A few more hefty fines (up to \$13,200) to make an example of some cowboys might be exactly what’s required to shake us up. The rules are very clear: if the cable being installed has the potential to be connected to a network you need to be licensed!

Benefits of training for the employer: I’ve heard it all before. Why should I spend good money on training when staff just move to another company? I can’t afford to have my guys in a classroom for three days. I can’t recoup the cost because margins are too tight; too much work on; not enough work on; the dollar has died in the arse... if I educate them they will want more money. *Blah blah blah.*

EDUCATE OR PERISH

I’m a firm believer that if you educate your staff they won’t *want* to leave. The sooner the AV industry gets behind itself and actively educates its own, the better.

So let me leave you with this thought: if you don’t want to risk losing your employees because you have educated them, consider the possible implications if you didn’t and they stayed. 🐣

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