

ELEVATORS

Proprietary or Non-Proprietary ... That's the Question

To ensure that a building runs efficiently and profitably, building owners and managers need an elevator maintenance company that is part of their operational team. They should be able to choose the elevator company that best meets their requirements. This can only be done by increasing competition within the elevator industry.

By Phil Staite and Dave Balmer

Once upon a time (the 1970s) in a suburb not too far away, an elevator manufacturer (The Boss) had just concluded an interesting meeting with his new Chief Electrical Designer, (whom we will call Rolf). As The Boss stood by reflecting on the new data that had just been presented to him, Rolf was in the process of shutting down the elevator control simulator that had just demonstrated his new designs and he was feeling pretty good. The Boss had even patted him on the back as he walked away from the test bench with a wry grin on his face.

Rolf contemplated his earlier comments to The Boss and wondered which one had pleased him so. What had he said? "Well Boss, this new design works like a dream as you have just witnessed. It will save us a tremendous amount of money, will be extremely reliable and will offer our customers the latest benefits in this new solid-state elevator programmable electronic. There is no downside to this system that I can see."

As an afterthought he had added laughingly: "The only thing is you better hope that I don't get hit by a truck on the way home because right now I am the only one who knows how to fix the programming if anything goes wrong!"

Unknown to Rolf, it was that last comment he had made that caused The Boss to smile. He had built a very successful company over the years by ensuring his company was resourceful and creative and as he was also an astute and creative businessman, he had immediately grasped the significance of the last statement uttered in jest by his chief designer. Elimination of competition!

Similar Controls

In the 70s and prior years with few exceptions, elevator controls were all very similar in that they were designed with analog systems of relays, contactors, mechanical timers and miles of 18 to 20 gauge wires to connect them all together. Sure the schematic designs themselves varied, but in essence elevator controls were for the most part, all very similar and components were standard and available throughout the industry.

Experienced elevator mechanics could service the elevator control systems and successfully troubleshoot problems. For this reason, many smaller service and maintenance companies



were “popping up” in large urban centres creating competition for service and maintenance contracts.

As building managers became more sophisticated they understood that a good preventive maintenance program for their elevators would save the building money and reduce elevator downtime. The building managers understood that the elevator system was an important component in their building’s operation and could also influence occupancy and rental rates, and therefore, directly influence the profitability of the building.

As elevator maintenance became more important to the building’s operation, it became an increasingly important source of revenue to the elevator manufacturing companies. The elevator manufacturers did not want to lose the maintenance revenue on the elevators that they had designed and installed.

If we go back to The Boss, we can now understand why he was so pleased about his Chief Electrical Designer’s comment. He was astute enough to recognize that he now had a tool available to control who won the maintenance and service contracts once the elevators were installed. If his Chief Electrical Designer (or his hand-picked personnel) were the only ones who could service the new “programmable controls”, then competition would be eliminated on the new elevator equipment.

They could also program a shutdown timer on the new controls so that elevators could be turned off automatically and could only be turned back on by a special programmable tool owned only by the manufacturer. The manufacturer could also control the selling price and delivery of all proprietary material if they chose to make it available on the market. Thus was born the proprietary form of programmable elevator controls.

Competition within the elevator industry will be intensified by insisting that only non-proprietary software and control systems are quoted for a modernization, a new installation or replacement elevator equipment. Of course there are many other parameters that are also important when specifying a new elevator or modernization or major repair, but one statement that must be enforced within the contract documents is one similar to the following:

Bidders must ensure that only non-proprietary software and hardware is provided for this project. Full and complete instruction manuals for program alterations must be provided to the owner with the final documents.

Conclusion

Always use the services of companies which clearly state and can prove that they provide only 100 per cent non-proprietary software and equipment. **CAM**

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