



The Association for Quality in
Audio Visual Technology, Inc.

"Saving the AV Industry...one system at a time"

Discerning Questions to Ask Prospective AV System Providers

To be a success, the daunting task of procuring something as complex as audiovisual technology is relies on how well the Buyer can anticipate that a prospective vendor can and will do a good job. This means on-time delivery, exactly as ordered, performance as expected, and installed with the best practices that will assure the least amount of maintenance. Knowing what questions to ask and scrutinizing the responses to those questions can avoid long, never-to-be-resolved punch lists, irate meetings, and dissatisfied Users that can threaten your reputation. All vendors purport they will do a good job and have the best intentions of doing so. Today's Buyer needs to find evidence that the prospective vendor has a trained, equipped team with consistency in the operational arts that can only come from a company with a defined, organized system of processes. Today's Buyer needs proof that these processes are in place.

Question: May we have a copy of your Quality Policy?

The Quality Policy is the statement a provider makes about how their company values the conformance to a specification. It should be easy for anyone to read and include information on how the company goes about living up to this policy. Assuring Quality is easy, but the work is not. A vendor that truly values its quality assurance shares its evidence of customer satisfaction with pride.

Question: What is the name of the individual in your company that is accountable for Quality Management?

Most companies have individuals with clear accountability for Marketing Management, Sales Management, Operations, Purchasing, etc. Companies would not do well in these disciplines unless management assigns an individual process owner. Similarly, if a company has no one assigned to be accountable for Quality Management, then no one with the authority will react to problems on a corporate scale, and there is a strong probability that any effort will be lacking. Corrective action, if required, will be cumbersome at best.

Question: May I see a list of your calibrated field instrumentation?

Without calibrated instrumentation, a vendor lacks the ability to "put a number on things", opening the door to arguing compliance on purely subjective grounds, wasting valuable time doing so. Certificates of calibration should be offered. For a list, see the free resources page on the AQAV website for the "Standard Specifications" document, which includes the minimum inventory required. This inventory should be readily portable for field measurements.

Question: Describe the Processes you have in place to assure compliance with the specifications.

Well-defined processes for everyone involved with designing, fabricating and delivering complex systems are essential. This especially holds true in the audio-visual technology industry, where the technology changes

rapidly. Ideally, the vendor incorporates the AV9000 checklists into their procedures, since no other checklists, especially home-grown ones, are as successful in identifying defects before a project is turned over.

Question: What evidence do you have that these processes meet customer specifications?

A reputable company creates an audit report showing the results of the testing that took place at key milestones of the project, providing evidence that the company follows their processes. For example, look for an AV9000 Staging Checklist signed by a certified individual who will affirm that the battery of tests has been completed. Likewise, a signed checklist should be available for Design Review, Commissioning, etc. Does the prospective company offer letters of acceptance from other customers where they state they have received all the expected deliverables?

Question: What certifications do you have with regards to this process?

Audit Reports are certificates of compliance showing agreement with the specifications on the grounds of product, practices, and performance. Individuals who affirm this compliance need to show that they have the credentials for training and certifications that they indeed know how to perform the tests in the checklists. Certifications from InfoComm International show proficiencies in designing and installing, manufacturer certifications show proficiencies in their product's correct application, and AQAV certifications show that the vendor has personnel with demonstrated skills in AV Quality Assurance.

Question: What processes do you have for corrective actions?

Things inevitably go wrong, and oftentimes due to missed communications between parties. The supplier should have processes in place to deal with these problems and keep the Buyer in the loop for how the problems are being corrected. The procedure should provide for timely responses, contact information for escalation issues, and communications logging.

Question: Can you provide references from current AND former clients who did business with you for at least 2 years?

AV Systems take a while to produce and install, and oftentimes defects do not show up right away. A Buyer wants to see evidence that good communications and performances are maintained throughout ownership, and that the vendor will continue to support the system well after it is installed.

*Remember: sound management dictates making purchasing decisions based not on price tag alone, but in the **Total Cost of Procurement**. Track hours that you and your staff take in quality assurance activities on each vendor you choose and convert those hours to dollars based on salary and benefits. That will give a more accurate price tag. Refer to the "Total Cost of Poor Quality" spreadsheets on the AQAV website for more information.*