

Relocation: A Moving Experience

by Gordon S. Carter, Professional Audio Services

One morning you are busily working on a recalcitrant cart machine that insists that some stop cues, but not all of them, are not good enough for it. You can find no consistency from cart to cart or from machine to machine. In fact, the same cart will sometimes play through and will sometimes stop.

You are on your fourth cup of coffee, and it is only 9:30 AM. In the middle of all of this, you are summoned to the GM's office. When you get there, you also find the PD, Sales Manager, the bean counter and a few other key staff members. After a few pleasantries, the GM quickly gets to the point.

"The rent in this place is killing us. We have a year left on our lease and then we're moving out. We may even move sooner if we can get a good enough deal."

After everyone except you compliments the GM on his forward thinking, he begins to fill in the details. The PD and Sales Manager will work with him as a team to find the right location. The Financial Manager will figure out how to make the budget work out.

And you, the Chief Engineer, will be responsible for planning the entire broadcast center and making the move happen. Of course, you will have to keep the present facility working until moving day so there will be no lost air time. As you try to gather your senses, you object that there isn't enough time to do all of this. "Nonsense," says the GM, "we have a full year. Now, let's all get to work."

Walking out of the room, you wonder to yourself, "What do I do first? How do I proceed? How do I get it all done in time?"

Start at the Beginning

Over the course of the next few months we will look at everything involved in moving a radio station. We'll consider some approaches and techniques to design and build the studios and how to get it all done on time and with no or little lost air time.

When a decision to move has been made, one of the first things that

must be decided is a reasonable timetable.

Simply finding the right location and the right deal may take a year or more, depending on how picky you are and how much you want to compromise. You should allow at least three months to pick a broker or representative and to find a place that fits your needs.

Once you've found a place, closing the deal can take a few weeks to a few months, depending again on a number of factors. If you are renting, it can be completed fairly quickly. If you are buying, however, and need to get financing, getting to closing may take a month or more.

Envisioning the Future

While looking for a new location, be aware of a few possible pitfalls. If you are in a large city or an area near transmitters (your own or someone else's), be sure to check for high levels of RF.

Also, check for possible acoustic problems that may make for noisy studios. Proximity to airports or highways can be a big problem with an open mic. It never sounds good on the air to have a truck shifting through all of its gears while you are giving a newscast.

As you look at possible locations, keep in mind the needs of your station and the possibilities of the building. If you are renting or buying an existing building, column and window locations can make a place acceptable or unacceptable. If you are looking for a piece of property on which to build, you may have more latitude in designing your space.

You should also begin thinking of possible plans for your new facility. While each space will dictate a different floor plan, you should have a good idea of the number and sizes of the various rooms you will need. Here are a few questions you should ask yourself.

How many production rooms and studios will I need above my master control room? How big will each room have to be to accommodate people and equipment? Will I need a

newsroom, and how big should it be? Where will I house equipment that is common to all rooms? Of course, these ideas will trigger even more questions as you go along.

Now the Work Begins

The planning portion of the project may take a few days or a few weeks, depending on the size and complexity of your facility. But be sure you have complete plans before you begin any work, especially if you are working with contractors.

These should include construction plans showing all details of any special construction, floor plans showing the location of all equipment and electrical plans. You should have separate plans for electrical power and for audio wiring. The more time you put in during the planning stages, the easier it will be to get things up and running and to troubleshoot later.

Finally you get to the construction phase of the project. If you are doing work in an existing building, this may take six months to a year, again depending on the size and complexity of the project. If you are building your own building from scratch, it may be a year or more before you can move in.

A final word about moving a radio station. Unless you have lots of time on your hands or a big staff, you will most likely need help. In many communities you will need an architect to help get the plans through the local building department.

A good studio consultant can help guide you through all the complexities of your project, from finding a place that is usable, to designing the proper acoustics and equipment layout and wiring in your studios. The fees you will pay for this service may very likely be saved by meeting schedules and having things work as they should. We will look at this in more detail next time.

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