

Show and tell

Nick Michaelson of Silver Fox argues the importance of good labelling and why it shouldn't be overlooked.



The cost of a label is tiny, the differential between a poor quality and a good quality label is even less. But the cost to the end user of getting it wrong can be immense. Lack of proper reliable labelling can cost the end user thousands if not tens of thousands of pounds in lost profits, dwarfing the cost of the 'humble' label.

Sadly, there are still contractors who are not willing to invest the time and resources to label their networks properly. Even in our own building we had a little battle with the contractors and we are in the labelling business.

Where cables need to be quickly and accurately traced, proper reliable labelling that performs consistently over all areas and 'climatic' conditions is essential. These conditions cover general office areas but more importantly include communication cabinets, maybe even partial or full external applications. In these circumstances labels may also need to work well at high and low temperatures, as well as different types of humidity. And, where labels are used externally in areas close to the coast, they should also be capable of resistance against such abrasives as salt.

And then there are the visual effects. Labelling is one of the very first things the client sees as they review their new installation. So the opportunities to impress hugely outweigh the cost of the labels. As one industry sales person put it, 'Get the labelling right, and on review, I'm 90 per cent there. Get it wrong and I know I have a long hard climb.'

Perhaps some of the reasons for the reticence to properly plan and label come from the expectation by the contractor on the time to actually produce the labels. But even here, there are opportunities for the contractor to save potentially significant amounts of money, and add to their bottom line with greater profitability. Consider this; a few years ago we

commissioned a study on the use of handhelds (cable label printers) up against a PC based solution. The results were quite staggering, for a 10,000 drop job, quite literally hundreds of hours of expensive time could be saved (1.6 hours against worst case of 197 hours for handheld or to put it another way – a morning against five man weeks). Imagine the cost of these hours. True, handhelds are a very good solution, but the contractor needs to consider the time element with care. A few hours invested up front to plan and evaluate might save hundreds at the coalface. Not only is labour expensive, but time is expensive, the faster the job is finished the sooner the contractor can submit their invoice.

A few years back I was invited to give a full conference presentation at BICSI in Orlando. When my time came, I was half expecting the hall to clear as engineers went off to do other things. Actually, quite the reverse happened, more came in. By the end of the presentation I had a queue of engineers waiting to express their support for proper durable systematic labelling, some end users even told me of their frustrations with poor labelling by their contractors.

The feedback I got from that presentation, coupled with years of meetings both on site and in our offices, have convinced me that there are significant opportunities (mostly untapped), for the professional contractor, and they all come from this low ticket item. Without doubt the opportunities far outweigh the costs of the humble label.

So in summary, all this leads to is a clear need for both contractors and end users to take care of this tiny element of their project. It maybe in this economic climate the savvy contractor needs to harness everything available to get that edge, win the business, impress the customer and control costs but managing the labelling can significantly help. ■

Do you agree or disagree with Nick's views? If you have a comment to make on this or any other aspect of the network infrastructure industry contact Michael Crane on 01353 616117 or email michael@terringtonltd.co.uk.