

[CASE STUDY]

Firefly Wants to Ease the Burden of Design and Documentation

With the current state of the economy, keeping up with a backlog of installation work is not the same problem it was a year ago. Nevertheless, the ability by integrators to offer well-written sales proposals, expertly designed systems, and professionally documented work is just as important to the success of custom installation companies as ever. Firefly Design Group, a new consulting firm out of Hollywood, Florida, wants to help ease this burden on integrators by providing turnkey design, process, and engineering services to an industry that often lacks enough trained personnel to get the job done right.

"Selling's the easy part," said Firefly president Ron Callis. "Now pulling off that project so that you have a happy, smiling customer at the end—after delivering that project on time and on budget—is the challenge."

Callis is a mechanical engineering graduate of Virginia Tech who also worked for Lutron and Crestron in regional management position. During his years visiting dealers in his territory, Callis got the sense that while technical skills were rarely a problem in the industry, professional sales, design, and engineering processes were often lacking. Providing an outsource solution for integrators was something that appealed to both Callis' engineering background and his entrepreneurial spirit.

Firefly's mission is to provide services and create tools that enhance an integrator's operational efficiency, elevate

its corporate image, and increase its profitability by eliminating the bottlenecks created by time-consuming proposal generation.

"Our Lifecycle Support package assists the dealer with the sales approach, but then also helps them with all of the documentation and reports that they need throughout that project that help them properly execute that project."

The goal, Callis added, is to encourage his integration clients to work off a set of "as-builts" throughout a project. "At four stages of the project, we supply the dealer with working reports, working proposals and as-built drawings, so that their project installers, are always working on accurate, up-to-date information."

Callis and his team take great pride in the quality of its Visio and AutoCAD design and engineering work on the D-Tools platform, but just as much care goes into the overall look of their documents. "We like to put that extra polish on our work," Callis explained, noting that his team includes graphic designers in addition to project engineers.

Whether it's the details within an engineering drawing or the aesthetics of a sales proposal, Firefly's focus is on providing a consistent customer experience. "We want our dealers to know exactly what

Two examples of the detail that goes into Firefly Design Group's engineering documentation and presentation packages.

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— Ron Callis, President, Firefly



they're going to get from us, when they're going to get it, and what it's going to cost," Callis said. "Likewise if all of the divisions within their company get to realize the benefits of that process, from accounting to project management, to programming to installation, if they're working off a consistent, step-by-step process of reporting documentation that they're going to receive to execute that project, it's going to help them become more efficient, and more profitable."

Firefly works mostly off retainer, and has set a certain standard for its clients. "We're looking for clients who value engineering, seeing what we do as simply a value-add for them. They take our service, market it up, and it's a profit center for them."

The company prefers to establish a business commitment level upfront from a dealer client. The higher the commitment level, the better the rate. "We can justify decreasing our fees with that higher commitment, because when we work with a dealer for more than a few projects we become more efficient in that working relationship. If I do one job for a company, it will not run as smoothly as if I run 10 jobs for that company."

Ultimately, Firefly wants to emulate their customer's company, so that they are invisible to the homeowner client. "We become their engineering department, essentially," Callis explained. "It might only be for 25 percent of their jobs, but when we produce work for them, the Firefly name and logo do not appear on anything. The dealer's name and logo appears on that work. We're behind the scenes. We're there to make them look good."

—Jeremy J. Glowacki

