



BGC-023

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## **WOULD YOU RATHER BE HANDCUFFED TO A BOX OR A PERSON?**

In general, I suppose it would depend upon the weight of the box and the personal hygiene habits of the individual. Personally, I would rather have someone to talk to rather than a box to sit on.

Breaking free of handcuffs is now a viable third option. Years ago, when a Facilities Manager first chose a BMS product range, they were making a life-long commitment second only to marriage or choosing a bank. The decision required an ability to predict the future that even Mystic Meg would be proud of.

The technology nowadays allows end-users to break free and not be handcuffed in any way. Firstly, open protocols eliminated the ties to any particular type of box. Subsequently, BACnet has eliminated the ties to the person/engineer.

With previous "open" protocols, only the geek who had bound all the so-called open systems together knew how it all worked. BACnet means; no more network binding, no product royalties to pay and no additional configuration tools or dependence on a particular semiconductor.

Statistics from the BCIA trade association show more than twice as much product is installed by independent systems integrators than directly by manufacturers. The integrator market share has grown over the last twenty years. I suggest this is a good thing as the market is leading itself towards a route that allows more freedom of choice.

BACnet encourages the industry to work on relationships rather than being led by a "one size fits all" approach from suppliers offering a single product range. I would say however that issues are rarely down to the product itself.

BMS has been here for a while and products tend to do what they say on the tin. Issues are usually caused by the people behind the product, not the product itself.

Fundamentally, BACnet helps in two ways:

It allows horizontal integration between competing BMS product ranges. Historically end-users were quite rightly sceptical of this promised miracle cure. Now we have real life examples where handcuffed clients have been able to extend their sites with alternative products.

It allows vertical integration between non-competing products such as BMS to intelligent plant equipment such as chillers and drives.

Initial decisions regarding the future of your system's architecture are still as important as ever. It is never too late to change. In recent months, we have been comparing price differences between BMS product ranges. In some cases, we have seen over 50% difference in the project costs. The controller cost is not the only variable. Controller choice affects the associated peripherals, control panels and electrical wiring. Product selection can make or break capital budgets.

So, how can end-users make the most of their system?

Make sure that whatever BMS system you choose, it is certified "native BACnet." This will allow you to change horses in the future. If a client is locked-in, value-for-money could become an elusive luxury. It's a rare sales rep who keeps his prices low for a client who can't go anywhere else.

Make sure that plant items such as drives, chillers, room units have a BACnet connection built-in. This reduces the cost of engineering and additional sensors as all the data is already contained in the equipment you are interfacing with.

Mix and match systems. Use different manufacturers for different HVAC applications around the building. The "one size fits all" approach is not necessarily the right one.

Integrators are product independent and can advise in the best interests of the end-user. At least ask their opinion. Manufacturers selling direct to end-users, will specialise in one product range and may know how to get the most out of that particular system, but they are unable to offer a choice of systems.

Work on relationships and break free of being focused on specific product choices. Relationships allow product flexibility and creative thinking. Partnering with a proactive team who know what they are doing, can save a customer a fortune. Relationships are also easier to change, which certainly gives more incentive to keep the price keen and ensures suppliers deliver a more proactive service.

Talk to other end-users that have installed BACnet systems and compare notes. Hind-sight from their experiences will save time and money and also surely generate other integration ideas.

Any end-user who reads this and feels they are handcuffed to a historic product decision does not have to feel that way. They should at least discuss the possibilities with an independent source. In many cases, system changes can be made without the need to change the current front-end graphics system.

I don't know if what I am saying is politically correct and I may have a third party open my post for a while. I do know however, what I am saying is in the best interests of the customer and that's good enough for me!