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When divestiture struck AT&T in 1984, building owners found themselves with an endless number of communications opportunities. The intelligent building was given a whole new definition -- what was originally meant as a means of energy

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conservation and crime prevention soon became a system capable of sophisticated telecommunications and data processing. But where does the intelligent building stand in 1989?

Today's communications environment includes: voice (telephone), data (networking computers and workstations), written and graphic communications (FAX machines), inter- and intrabuilding video systems, and many others. Private branch exchanges (PBX), office automation equipment, and computers are all put in the same building and are forced to all communicate with one another.

Because of this new hardware and the vendors who sell it, owners must be aware of increasingly high standards set by both the telecommunications business and building tenants. "Since divestiture, today's smart building, especially in voice and data, is going through tremendous growth," says Bruce Harris, director, telecommunications division, Continental Electrics, a telecommunications contractor. "The term smart building, however, has almost become passe. Presently, there isn't that much temperature control going on the same wiring. There seems to be a general resistance to this kind of usage in the market."

Vendor compatibility

Unfortunately, complicated installations and connections, as well as increased costs and performance failures, all too often result in dissatisfied customers. The biggest problem has turned out to be not only that traditional coaxial cables are difficult and costly to work with, but also that multi-vendor, multi-function networks are inflexible, expensive, and mutually exclusive. It is important for the owner to realize communications systems, FAX machines, energy management and computer systems all need to work together. All too often this has not been the case. Repetitive, complicated installations can fatally disrupt a business trying to keep up with changes in the high-productivity communications field.

"It has reached the point where it can take as many as 20 to 30 days to deliver one to ten lines to a specific building just because it is overcrowded," says Nancy Wolfe, president, The Telephone Company of Chicago." All the wires and pairs are being used."

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