

# A New Way of Thinking

Behave like a mega yacht architect, not an A/V box pusher

by Brian Barr



The author at the Monaco Yacht Show in Monte Carlo.

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Last week, I attended the Mega Yacht Show in Monaco. At this annual event of extravagance exists some of the finest examples of true professionalism, uniqueness, customization, physical dreams, passion, craftsmanship, engineering, architectural and design talent, sales, marketing and, of course, millionaires and billionaires.

At the show, the most common topic of conversation surrounded the importance of relationships in the super mega yacht business. The super mega yacht (SMY) industry focuses 100 percent on top people, relationships, teamwork, talent, education, reliability, accountability,

professionalism, performance, protocols, budget and timeliness.

Rarely throughout the week did I witness or participate in conversations about a specific product manufacturer or product model number. The few conversations that did only mentioned the product's ex-

act role in an SMY specific project. Even the product manufacturers' representatives rarely spoke of an individual product. Rather, they thoroughly explained how their manufacturing company provides standard and custom solutions for yachts, and often gave specific examples (though

never mentioning clients' names or discussing the names of the yachts in question). Similar to all ultra elite industries, exclusivity, uniqueness, client privacy, anonymity, safety and security are of utmost importance.

**DON'T BE A PUSHER**

Sometimes dealers in our industry say their business associates do not sell or "push" boxes. However, I have yet to meet any individual who owns and operates a high-end audio/video installation business who truly possesses a zero "box pusher" mentality. Ask yourself: Did you or have any of your employees uttered the names of a single A/V manufacturer and product model in the last month? Did you have any conversations at CEDIA regarding A/V manufacturers and product models? If you answered, "yes," to either of these two questions, you now have to ask yourself if you discussed the A/V manufacturer or products on their own merits, or if you only discussed them relative to their positive function in one or more of your installations. If you only discuss them more in line with the latter, congratulations. You positively behave like a mega yacht architect! If not, you are still acting like a box pusher.

Look at it from another industry's perspective. Can you imagine a swimming pool contractor selling custom manufactured and installed pools, as well as landscaping, based on the "exclusivity" of the brands and model numbers of the pool pump, PVC pipe, and wire that they provide? You have to sometimes realize that an audio/video control system is often no more interesting to a client than an HVAC thermostat!

The SMY industry, in turn, speaks of completed projects as a whole entity. It does not speak of its individual parts/components. It speaks of a yacht's size, capability, speed, functionality, and craftsmanship. The industry even speaks of the professionals—the architects, ship builders, designers, navigation specialists, cabinetmakers, and security and audio/video providers—as the "team" involved with the project. Meanwhile, model numbers

and brands of equipment aboard the yacht are rarely singled out.

**THE UNIFIED APPROACH**

In the A/V industry we have to step back from being excited about A/V equipment (including the control system) and get excited about the overall experience. A dealer must learn to properly design, engineer, install, and calibrate the entire system, and speak of that system as an entity and how it integrates with the larger entity—the home, yacht, aircraft, etc. Most importantly, installers need to explain to all professionals on the project, especially the client, how you, your teammates, and the A/V system will better improve lives of all those involved.

The statement that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link is very applicable in the luxury CE industry. Equally important is that the A/V system integrates seamlessly into the entire project. Custom manufactured equipment is very prevalent in the custom yacht, aircraft, and even the custom home industry. In fact, most components in a custom luxury home are custom manufactured. Thus, the best home A/V companies, architects, builders, and designers are beginning to request and specify custom manufactured audio/video equipment, as well, such as custom loudspeakers, amplifiers, cables, power conditioners, screens, racks, chairs, and more.

For the SMY industry, most components are custom manufactured. However, there are certain standard items. For example, the engine bears a brand name and has a specified model number. However, no two engine installations are the alike. The engineering, design, engine rooms, heat dissipation, cooling, and exhaust systems are all unique to each yacht installation.

I am not suggesting that the skill and professionalism in the SMY world always exceeds that of the top architects, engineers, designers, and craftsmen in the aircraft, home, or recording studio world. However, the "delta" (difference between great, good, and mediocre architecture, engineering, design, and build quality) in the SMY world and the aircraft world is smaller than the "delta" difference in

quality in the recording studio world and home world.

For example, all super mega yachts are spectacular and they all carry the look and feel of what one would expect a super mega yacht to look like when completed. These are highly engineered vessels. In fact, the best SMY projects usually contract a technical management firm to provide non-biased specifications (including equipment) and to overlook, specify, and project manage the entire design/build process. I am not suggesting that they are all perfect, but each yacht builder, architect, and designer truly understands and treats the SMY as a completed vessel. Only in the mega yacht and aircraft industries have I seen all professionals (including all subcontractors and service providers) install every component of the system with the best performance of the overall project in mind.

In contrast, many of the finest home projects do not properly address audio/video, acoustics, control, and power and grounding. And, rarely is the A/V integrator invited to participate at the beginning/early stages of the project, with the other design professionals. This should not be! We must all work together spread the message to the world that A/V system installation specialists needs to be invited to the project as early as possible.

The SMY world understands the concept of a team and makes certain that all necessary professionals are present at the first meeting. The yacht architects and technical management companies guide the client and sell nothing. All mega yacht professionals act like world-class chefs in regards to their ingredients (the standard and custom components for the mega yacht in question), and they completely understand how to masterfully work with their teammates, tools and ingredients.

**HERE THEY COME**

Now, it's time to tell you something very scary. Many of these yacht management businesses are specifying home audio/video projects because their billionaire yacht clients have more confidence and trust in their capability and professional-

ism than any home audio/video company they have ever met. And, having personally witnessed the operations of over a thousand of the top audio/video companies throughout the world, I, too, would hire such a company to overlook many of our elite A/V projects. It's strong to say, but I believe that there are less than 100 top audio/video installation companies that are as technically advanced and offer the unmatched level of engineering and professional service as some of the top yacht technical management companies and top yacht audio/video installation companies.

Furthermore, I believe that an ultra high end audio/video installation specialist and service provider could learn more and benefit more from a SMY technical manager than perhaps any other professional (inside or outside the A/V industry). In my own CAT business, I have worked countless hours designing, engineering, custom

manufacturing and calibrating high quality audio systems into multi-million dollar A/V projects for elite homes, recording/re-mastering studios, boardrooms, mega yachts, and aircraft. My CAT teammates and I need top audio/video installation companies throughout the world to continue to "step it up" to positively advance the ultra high-end audio/video industry we all love. To that positive end, the super mega yacht industry is perhaps the finest example of fun, excitement, creativity, architecture, design, build quality, craftsmanship, and performance alive in the world today. These yachting masterpieces provide fortunate A/V companies with the "perfect canvas" to create an audio/video masterpiece.

But it is not as if our A/V industry does not have something to offer the SMY market. The yachting world can learn and benefit a great deal from the elite A/V world, as well. Outdoor theaters, multi-room (re-

cording studio quality) systems, and quality home theaters are often used more at sea, than they are at home, and continue to grow in popularity. Maybe it's time both industries start talking more. •

**IT JUST GOES TO SHOW...**

The first three things most mega yacht owners will notice are malfunctioning:

- **The fixed-panel display (e.g. Crestron or AMX panel)**
- **The air conditioning**
- **The toilet (the "head", on a boat)**

Realize, that one of two engines may not be working, and the owner may not notice. Water may be leaking into the bilge, half the crew is down below to address the problem, and the owner may not notice. But, if the fixed panel display goes down during a major sporting event or during a romantic movie, you may have an angry yachter on your hands.

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