

# The value of a cable advisor

It comes down to getting it right before it goes wrong, particularly in a changing market where LEED and RoHS play such important roles.

A lot has changed in the last few months and most of it is for the better. Things are picking up everywhere and this is good news for our industry, but builders and developers are still proceeding with caution, and for good reason.

Some installers have learned the hard way that trying to cut corners by sourcing cable solely on the basis of price can sting you in the end. With the prospects of inflation, higher borrowing and labour costs and stricter environmental regulations on the horizon there is an even greater need to ensure you make the right choice the first time around. Unfortunately there are no shortcuts when it comes to cable and as the old saying goes: if the price sounds too good to be true then it probably is.

That can be difficult for both specifying engineers and installers at a time when new technologies, regulatory controls and cheap equivalents are constantly being introduced often driven by off-shore competition.

In these changing times, you need a cable distributor who is much more than a commodity cable supplier. You need them to be your product information advisor. Someone who understands the demands you face every day and one you can trust to provide the right product and service for your application, while meeting budget, building code and quality standards — both now and for the future.

**The impact of LEED and RoHS Compliance:** With high profile events such as the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) is emerging as a major green building rating system for many new building designers and developers in North America including when it comes to cabling.

The LEED certification process, which uses a point system to declare new buildings as “environmentally friendly,” is something we should all be thinking of in our future planning particularly since LEED now does allow “pilot” credits for certain types of cable products.

Another emerging and important development is the move to RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances) compliance. Although it is not currently recognized as a benefit or requirement of the LEED certification process, responsible cable manufacturers and distributors have adopted this protocol because they recognize the environmental benefits and because it is just the right thing to do.

Below is a real-life example of how a trusted cable advisor can add real value simply by asking the right questions before proposing a solution.

Hunt Electric in Ottawa was working on a project with specs that called for a specific brand of cable — 24 gauge, 1-pair, foil & braid shielded low capacitance with a maximum impedance of 120

ohms. The initial quote from their distributor came in at \$1.80/metre — an expensive proposition considering this job also required a complex and expensive installation process.

The question to their distributor was simple: Could they find a cheaper equivalent?

They immediately went to work and quickly found what seemed to be an equivalent cable at less than half the price. But before presenting this low cost alternative, they double-checked all the detailed specs with the manufacturer. The cheaper alternative was almost identical — except that the maximum impedance was only 100 ohms. They presented this information to Pat Hunt, who didn't want to take any chances and decided he needed a cable that met the exact performance specifications.

This particular installation was quite labour intensive and required their installers to work on lift trucks nine metres in the air, so they really could not afford to make a mistake on cable selection.

Trying to cut corners by sourcing cable solely on the basis of price can sting you in the end.

Thanks to the distributor's knowledge and supply chain expertise, they were finally able to deliver the specified cable at a savings of .40/metre. Simply by doing their homework, they saved the customer \$1,262.70 on cable costs alone. A nice piece of change, but peanuts compared to what it might have cost in liability or re-installation costs had they simply provided a “near equivalent” product based on price. That is something that happens all too often in our industry.

Estimates to remove and re-install cable on this particular job were in excess of \$40,000 had a price-driven, cable selection error been made. But this does not factor in the incremental losses in system performance which could have gone undetected. This begs the question how many kilowatts of power are lost annually due to poorly selected cable that is not doing what it was intended to do?

It is never wise to pay too much, but it is worse to pay too little when the product you are buying is incapable of doing the things it was meant to do.

Remember, it is important to make sure you get what you want, but more importantly, what you need.

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Phillippe Cormier is the vice president of operations at Cerco Cable ([www.cercocable.com](http://www.cercocable.com)), a distributor of specialized cable and accessories based in Montreal and Toronto. He can be reached at [pcormier@cercocable.com](mailto:pcormier@cercocable.com).