

Installation & Dismantle Labor General Contactor vs Independent Contractor

Did you know that you have a choice when it comes to installation and dismantle labor at your tradeshow? If your setup time exceeds the show's guidelines for doing the task yourself, your options are to either use the general contractor to perform the setup or to appoint an independent labor contractor of your choice. So how do you determine which is the best option for your firm? Perhaps the following considerations will assist you in making that decision.

Using the general contractor (the one that is assigned to install the pipe and drape, arrange drayage for all exhibitors, lay the aisle carpet, and do all installation and dismantle work that has not been contracted out with an independent labor firm) can be to your advantage in a few circumstances. It is worth considering this option when:

- 1) Your set-up time including carpet laying is very short, (1 or 2 persons for just an hour or two). The reason for this is that independent contractors usually charge a four hour minimum in most cities. Unions require labor contractors to pay each person that they use a minimum of 4 hours. The general contractor can avoid this minimum charge because they require the client to come over to their labor desk when they are ready to begin work, stand in line, and then request that setup begin on their booth. They then send the labor over as it becomes available from other projects (while you wait for them in the booth). Because Independent Contractors have fewer clients on any given show and because they allow their clients to specify the desired setup time exactly, they can not always be as flexible with waiving this minimum charge.
- 2) When exhibiting overseas it is often in your best interests to use the general contractor assigned to the show. This is due to the fact that ordering their services is straightforward, you need not search for reliable foreign independent labor firms, you may be avoiding intermediate vendor markups, and the general contractor is in an official position to assist you in interfacing with your other vendors due to possible language and cultural barriers. Outside contractors overseas generally charge a 1 day minimum.

Outside of the above two instances, it is almost always more advantageous for your firm to use an independent labor contractor to perform you installation and dismantle services. The reasons are myriad, but here are a few:

- 1) Individual attention: You are one of a handful of clients on any given show with most independent contractors. Thus you are treated as a valuable business partner.
- 2) Post show billings: Rather than paying in advance based on estimated hours, you are billed after the show closes for the actual hours of labor performed.
- 3) Efficiency & Damage Control: You almost always have the same lead person assigned to you for tear down as performed the set up. This representative will know how your booth came packed in the crates and will be able to repack them properly, eliminating a common cause of property damage.

- 4) Consistency: You may request the same lead person if you come back to this city for another show. Some lead people even travel with a booth if it is warranted. This may reduce set up time and overall cost.
- 5) Skill of Labor Force: The caliber of labor is often better with an independent contractor. Independent labor lead personnel are required have their own tools.
- 6) Account Executives: If you choose a national independent contractor, you will be assigned to the “care” of an account executive. This person will be a single point of contact no matter where your show is held. They can assist you with any problems that may arise. Because you develop a personal relationship with this person and their sole purpose is to keep you as a satisfied customer, problem resolution is much easier.
- 7) City Managers: Independent contractors have city managers whose job it is to oversee the labor at each show. They have contacts and resources that can assist you with last minute needs: graphics repair, booth repair, missing items, air freight pickups, etc. In addition, they keep a fully stocked gang box on site with many of the tools and extra items that your booth may need.
- 8) Accessibility: Both your account executive and the city manager are accessible 24 hours a day.
- 9) Cost: Although the charge for independent labor may sometimes be slightly higher per hour than that of the general contractor, due to the above reasons, the bottom line is almost always lower.

In summary, unless you are exhibiting internationally or you have an extremely easy do-it-yourself sort of booth set-up, it is probably in your firm’s best interest to employ the services of an independent labor contractor. It is important to know that for most shows it will be necessary to fill out one form called the Exhibitor Appointed Contractor Letter. This form notifies the general contractor and show management that you are planning to use an independent contractor. It also should be sent to your choice of contractor so that they can submit the proper insurance certificates. There is usually a time deadline (often 30-60 days prior to move-in) to get these forms submitted. Be sure to check your Show Services Manual early so that you can take advantage of having the best labor alternative for your firm’s installation and dismantle needs.