

How to Choose an M&E Specialist Sub-Contractor



The Challenge

Occupiers and Operators of Commercial properties need to ensure that their Facilities operate in an efficient and reliable way, and Landlords, Occupiers and Facilities Contractors need to ensure that the specialist contractors such as Air Conditioning, Refrigeration, Heating, Fire, Security, Lifts/Escalators, UPS, BMS etc. that are going to work in their building(s) have the expertise, knowledge and back-up in case of an Emergency.

Commercial Buildings are becoming more complex and many of these have the latest equipment installed, so making sure that these systems can be serviced, repaired and upgraded is vitally important.

However the issues Facilities Contractors and Building occupiers face when choosing a suitable specialist HVAC or M&E Contractor to work with them can be complex, so when

you need your HVAC system serviced, replaced or repaired then you will need to hire an HVAC contractor who is knowledgeable and specialised to work on the equipment in your building. Furthermore depending on the equipment they may have to be licensed too.

How to choose an M&E specialist contractor is an important concept to master because not all contractors are the same, and doing your research may mean the difference between getting a professionally refurbished Chiller or AHU and getting ripped off.

Think about it, are all car mechanics the same? What about all doctors? Not all contractors are bad. In fact, there are many out there that still do things the right way. Use this "Hiring a Contractor Checklist" to help keep you out of trouble and your systems running efficiently for years to come.

Ambient Air Advice & Support



A specialist HVAC or M&E sub-contractor contractor should be properly trained, insured, and have certifications that comply with professional M&E procedures in addition to other qualifications.

There are an endless number of Contractors that claim to be able to work on these aforementioned systems, and right across the spectrum. Larger national Business with 20 or more employees to small one-man bands. All wanting to work with you. So who trust and how do you go about checking them out?

via an external provider. This can be in the form of a Pre-qualification questionnaire to determine some basic facts including at least.

Choosing a good contractor to refurbish an Air Handling unit or Central Air Conditioning system can be as important as the equipment you initially choose, because proper installation and maintenance is needed for the equipment to operate safely, reliably, and at maximum efficiency. Here are some suggestions for selecting a contractor.

- If you already know a reputable M&E specialist sub-contractor, that is a good place to start. If you don't, business colleagues in the area can often give you recommendations.
- Most leading contractors belong to specialist trade organisations especially if there is one relating to their trade.
- Furthermore many are registered with the BIFM (British Institute of Facilities Management www.bifm.org.uk or the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers www.cibse.org.uk along with many others.

- A good estimator should also ask about any technical problems you may have had with your equipment, and offer understandable explanations or solutions
- If you are considering Energy equipment upgrades then using their heat-load and/or cooling-load calculations, good contractors should be able to estimate the annual operating costs (energy bills) for the new equipment/ upgrade they are proposing for your office.
- A good company will provide a written bid (or proposal) outlining the equipment to be refurbished/services/repared, outlining the work to be done, and the price, including any extra labour costs.
- We suggest you get estimates from several contractors, but try not to let the lowest price be the main reason for selecting a contractor. Better contractors may charge more, but they probably offer greater value. Be sceptical of extremely low bids; those contractors may not be including all routine services and parts or consumables, or they may be trying to just pitch you a low price for the 1st year.

Reliable contractors are professional. Their staff are prompt and courteous. They will be well established. How a company treats you now reflects how they will treat you if there is a problem. They should have an office or workshop, and they should not be happy if you want to visit them. An office or workshop is an indication that the company has been in business and intends to remain in business.

Just because a specialist M&E or HVAC contractor is popular doesn't always mean they are the right fit for your Business. M&E and HVAC contractors will be always in demand because businesses constantly need their HVAC systems either serviced, repaired, or replaced.

Do your homework and check the M&E sub-contractors Contractor's credibility and reputation before signing an agreement. Just follow these easy steps to choose a reliable HVAC contractor.

Ask for Contractor's Credentials

Make sure that the contractor has all the necessary permits to do the job. Find out whether your specialist M&E sub-contractor has experience with the maintenance, repair, or replacement of your existing system in order prevent future misunderstanding or technical problems.

If you are planning to refurbish your system, do thorough research to find out which contractors specialise in that particular make or model. A good contractor is one who will be there to guide you through the maintenance process. In the long run, knowing how to service the system yourself will save a considerable amount of money.

The Contract

Starting with the initial enquiry, keep all correspondence in writing. Sometimes it's best to send an email instead of calling the company directly. That way you can keep track of what is been said or promised. Don't rely on promises. Ask that all quotes or bids are returned in writing, so you can file them for later reference.

When you sign a contract, make sure that the paper contains:

1. The dates on which the work will be performed
2. A thorough breakdown of labour and equipment cost
3. Payment due dates
4. Deadline for project completion



Official Referrals

Ask for at least three referrals from former customers of your potential contractor. Call the referrals and ask all the questions you wish to get answered. That way you can ensure that your selection of a specialist contractor will lead to a successful business transaction for all sides involved.

Further Tips

- Be wary of an HVAC contractor that gives you a bid or an estimate over the phone.
- Just as no two cars are the same, no two air conditioning units are the same. Be wary of any HVAC contractor that tries to give you an estimate or a bid over the phone without having seen what equipment you have.
- When it comes to how experienced your HVAC contractor is, maybe at this point - take it with a pinch of salt. Experience isn't everything! Be wary of someone who is telling you that they have been "doing things this way for twenty years".

- There are new and exciting technologies that can decrease utility bills and are more efficient at heating or cooling. Be sure your contractor is well versed in cutting edge technologies including the most up-to-date HVAC control units –that runs your business's AC system for you, programmable with schedules and preferences.

- Experience is important, but it isn't everything.



Check The Licensing Credentials

Unfortunately, many Refrigeration contractors claim to be licensed, but are actually hiding under the radar. There is too much at stake, and a licensed Refrigeration contractor is licensed to only work on refrigeration systems and has to be REFCOM registered –Whatever your specialist - experts in each to get properly licensed. You don't want someone who isn't capping off your refrigerant pipework, or properly disposing of the Refrigerant.

It is a continual problem and is equivalent to a doctor operating without a license. A refrigeration contractor should be REFCOMS registered and have their registration number clearly marked on their literature and on their website. Without an official registration, there is no insurance and you could be fined. Make sure that the job will be done properly or that you can take recourse if it isn't! Don't trust anyone who isn't registered.

- Get the proper licensing and certification from them to work on commercial properties and make any necessary repairs. This ensures that the person will be familiar with all makes and models and that they carry the proper equipment for the job.

- Do you have experience servicing HVAC systems for large commercial properties? Commercial HVAC repair, replacement, and maintenance differs greatly from residential services. Generally, one packaged unit holds all of the components of a business's cooling and heating system. This is totally different from a split-system residential air conditioner, which is why you need an experienced commercial repair or maintenance specialist who can locate all of the components quickly..

- Can I call any time for future services? You should also make sure that the company you hire is able to make repairs or perform maintenance for your unit in the future, so that you can easily locate their contact information for services. A company that is available 24/7 is an added bonus, as you can make sure you can contact this company at any time.

Conclusion

The maintenance, repair, or replacement of an HVAC system is expensive. Follow all the suggested steps above to make the best choice and save your company money and time.

Don't hesitate to ask for copies of all necessary paperwork - such as licence, bond, insurance, or other professional certificates and permits - even if the contractor is recommended by your best friend.

If you're unsure, ask questions, ask for paperwork.



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