

Modernizing Your Elevators? Don't Fall Victim to Proprietary Controls.

By James B. Hutchinson, President of Pacific Elevator Corp.

If your building was built during Hawaii's new construction boom of the 1960's and 70's your elevators utilize an old "relay-logic" control system. These systems are made up of hundreds of electro-mechanical relays assembled on a panel and wired together to provide logic processing. They represented the state-of-the-art at the time of their installation.

With the advent of the microprocessor, elevators using these old relay-logic systems are today being modernized. Wires and relays are being replaced with lines of computer code. As a result, elevator technicians can no longer simply trace the source of problems by following wires from relay to relay, as dispatching logic and other operations are now hidden inside microchips.

Unfortunately for building owners and managers, some manufacturers of elevator control systems have chosen to profit by producing systems that require a special "proprietary" electronic service tool to perform vital maintenance functions. Surprisingly, it is mostly the larger multi-national elevator companies or OEM's (Original Equipment Manufacturers) who have chosen to take this route. If these companies had their way they would monopolize post-modernization elevator maintenance.

The same thing happened in the automobile industry. The auto industry used tactics such as self-expiring software, limited public availability of parts, and extremely limited accessibility of diagnostic tools.

In 2001, independent auto shops managed to get national legislation introduced to ban such anti-competitive practices. The bills were called "Right to Maintain" laws. In 2003, just before the bills were scheduled for a vote, the industry announced a settlement giving independents access to the same diagnostic codes, tools and repair data available to franchised dealers.

There are elevator control systems available that are truly non-proprietary or universally serviceable and maintainable. These systems are produced by independent manufacturers and available for installation by independent elevator contractors. The advantage to using independent elevator contractors is that they are not bound by a single supplier of control systems, but are free to purchase independently from suppliers of their choice. These companies still believe in working hard to earn your business, not working to hold you hostage with proprietary controls.

When planning your elevator modernization, you should strongly consider selecting a company that offers a non-proprietary control system. The control system must allow any elevator service provider unrestricted access to all parameters and levels of adjustment neces-

sary for the maintenance of the equipment. If these functions are accessible only with a special external service tool, then you should require that the contractor provide you with this tool and that it becomes the property of the building owner.

Choosing a non-proprietary control system allows a building owner to be free to choose, based on customer satisfaction, from among competitive service providers.

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