- LDI
- Master Classes
- Gear
  - Lighting
  - Projection
  - Staging
  - Sound
  - Live Gear Gallery
- Concerts
  - U2 360°tour
- Theatre
- Staging Rental
- Venues
- Architainment

- Bookmark (http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php)
- Save (#)
- Reprint (http://www.icopyright.com/3.7287?icx_id=livedesignonline.com /mag/lighting_control/index.html)
- Email (#)
- Print (#)

Under Control

Jul 1, 2005 12:00 PM, by Michael S. Eddy

Lighting control for clubs pretty much boils down to the lighting budget or "what you can sell the owner on," as one designer pointed out. Many club owners just don't see the value of lighting. They are more interested in the décor and audio, not realizing the punch that lighting gives both these areas. LD recently spoke with a few club designers about their choices for lighting control in this hard-sell market and what they would like to see in the future. As you would expect, clubs and lounges in the larger markets usually have larger control budgets, and those in smaller markets have to find control at a lower price point. However, after speaking with two designers of larger clubs and two designers who work on a smaller scale, the differences weren't that great, aside from what they can spend. They all want value for the money and flexibility in the features.

THINK BIG

Lighting designer Stephen Lieberman, principal of SJ Lighting, Inc. of Oak Park, CA has a prestigious design resume including the recent additions to the large club scene of Crobar in New York City, Nocturnal in Miami, and Club Zen in Trinidad. Lieberman used the MA Lighting grandMA light console for all of these clubs' lighting control. The grandMA light has really suited his needs and he especially likes how easy an operator can quickly get up to speed on the console.

"In Trinidad, they had barely seen a [Jands] Hog 1000, so to bring a grandMA down there was special," Lieberman says. "The guy running lights at the club had previously been working on a [Martin] LightJockey system. I put him in front of the desk, and he was blasting out a show by the end of the night. He did great. It is a little expensive, but if I can get the club owner to go for it, I'll put in a grandMA every time."

Lieberman's choice of control has a lot to do with the features he needs. "All of these controls are just toolboxes, and you take what you need from the controller; not every designer needs every tool," he says. "It just so happens that today the grandMA has everything and then some of what I need. If you are running LEDs, there is nothing more spectacular than a grandMA. I'm doing a club at the Venetian right now, and I'm putting in a Martin LightJockey system. The club told me that they want something simple — maybe a touchscreen and a mini keyboard; so the LightJockey was the right choice. It has a very reasonable cost, and it has all the needed functionality. Now the more money you spend on a console, the easier programming becomes. So programming is a little tedious, but as for control, it gets the job done. It has a lot of nice features. Also, there is such a plethora of LightJockey operators out there, especially in the major markets, that it also helps take some of the pain out of getting a club open."

Las Vegas-based Adam Wuertz, technical director for the N9NE Group, whose properties include the clubs Rain Nightclub and ghostbar at the Palms Casino and Resort, is in the midst of an expansion project at The Palms with a new tower scheduled to open in 2006 that will include a new club and lounge. Most recently, Wuertz opened Desert Rain and SpaceBar in Palm Springs. He used a grandMA for Desert Rain and a High End Systems Hog PC for SpaceBar. "The Hog PC is working fine, but I'm not so sure I'm thrilled about the setup," he explains. "We went with the laptop so we could bring it out into the room, and the laptop isn't quite as reliable. If we had gone with a rack-mount computer, we would have lost the functionality, but it would have been more reliable. I would probably want something that uses a rack-mount computer that allows me to connect via Ethernet to give me a control port." Wuertz has favorite controls for different budgets. "I still look to the Avolites Azure as my smaller lighting console if I'm trying to come in on a budget in a smaller venue. Functionality-wise, it is a really powerful console, and price point-wise, it comes in way under some of the competitive consoles to it."

The way the venue is operated also dictates the control choices for Wuertz. "The Hog PC is there [SpaceBar] because it is mostly an automated venue; most nights it is not operator-driven," he says. "The grandMA is in Desert Rain because it has the most flexibility and the most power of any console out there right now. There are other consoles out there in the same class, but none of them have as many hands-on features. When you are running at a nightclub, you need as many things as possible at your fingertips."

Both Lieberman and Wuertz would like to see better controls for dealing with LEDs built right into the lighting control. "I think that grandMA has always been one step ahead of everybody," says Lieberman. "They just implemented Bitmap Effects where you map out a whole matrix, whether it is LEDs or other color mixing fixtures, and run bitmaps through it; manipulate them left and right and zoom them in and out." Wuertz concurs that LED control is important to him as well. "I would love to see something along the lines of Color Kinetics ColorPlay software integrated into the MA Lighting software simply because it is so powerful for LEDs," Wuertz says. "Programming LEDs on a moving light console is like pulling teeth, really time intensive. Software specifically designed for LEDs would be great in the console."

MORE BANG FOR THE BUCK

In smaller markets, club designers are looking at total lighting budgets that would barely cover the control systems in larger clubs. In many of these clubs, controllers need to be in the $1,000 range. Much of the control in this range is going to be software that is added into a personal computer or a DMX Recorder/Playback unit. The lighting is often pre-programmed and triggered by the DJ. However, the lower price point doesn't mean that these designers don't put just as much consideration into the features and function of the control.

Eddy Hobby, principal of Hermitage, TN-based ProSonics installs club packages in the Nashville area. Some of his recent projects include the NV Bar & Niteclub in Nashville and Babe's Sports Bar in Chattanooga. For many clubs in this market, lighting is not a high monetary priority, but Hobby sees the owners starting to buy more. "There was a visiting technician that travels around doing these big DJ parties, and he was complaining that here in Nashville, all the clubs were behind in the lighting, and he always had to supplement the house systems with a rental package," says Hobby. "He was surprised the club owners wouldn't invest in more advanced systems like in other parts of the country. The club owner of NV is starting to invest more, and every couple of months he adds a little more. He is really starting to see the energy the lighting brings to the club. Depending on the area of the country, with some of these clubs, you are lucky if you get $20,000 out of them for the whole lighting budget; then you are doing pretty well. So the price point on control at this level is tight. That's just the market, so the price point of the controller is important."

For lighting control, Hobby uses "usually one of the Elation Show Designers or one of their DMX-recordable devices. That allows me to pre-record a show, and they have a couple of choices to play. The club here in town, NV, has Martin Show Designer, and they have an LD that runs the show; in Chattanooga, they have a DMX Recorder/Playback unit because they just have a DJ doing everything, so I prerecorded a show that can repeat itself every 45 minutes. Every club is different; it depends on if the club is going to invest in the personnel. One club is going to have an LD, while another is only going to have the DJ doing everything."

For Anthony Dever, owner of DigitalSound Production Services in Long Beach, CA, Elation Lighting Compuware software is his control of choice. Dever works a lot with Dennis Rodman, and the recently re-opened Rodman's Lounge in Newport Beach, CA, is one of his signature projects. When asked what he thinks of the Compu Club version, Dever responds, "Unbelievable. I love it. Honestly, it has saved me so much time creating a show. The Compu Club just gives you unbelievable options." Dever works with his lighting technician, Edward Bernal, who programs much of the lighting for installations.

Dever also likes the fact that Compu Club is flexible enough for various situations. "We can program it to be left alone with a full, seven-hour DJ set, or we can have it control on the fly. It can be triggered anyway we want."

The budgets for many of these clubs dictate the price point of the control choices, but the final choice in the category is often about flexibility. "The Show Designer is a great controller for the money," comments Hobby. "It has some nice programming aspects to it, and it can run more than one chase at a time, and you can override things pretty easily. It is reasonably intuitive for the money; it does a nice job. You always have to be really aware of how user-friendly the equipment is going to be to the club operators or the DJs. I usually do all the programming, but at clubs like NV, where they have somebody, I was able to show them how to do some overrides of colors or gobo preset, and they can get a different look out of the system."

When looking ahead at the future of control, Hobby sees ease of programming as one feature that he looks forward to: "The computer programs that create light movements for you, like Elation's Compu Club, make programming the shows so much easier." Both Hobby and Dever would like to

see more variations of hardware to support the software packages. "I would love to see more capability in the hardware of backup and editing of shows via computer that is still downloadable back to the hardware," says Hobby. "I would like to see something where I could create a program at the office and then download to the controller, but where they could also make some real time changes at the club as well." Dever looks for the same options. "It would be nice if it came like a control board just for this software, but it would be an integrated controller just for this Elation software," Dever says. "I would also like to see this software for OS X on the Mac." Both know that much of their wish lists are available for more money, but higher end features at a reasonable price point would be very welcomed.

At the end of the day, it all comes down to how much control that you can get for your money. Whether big budgets or small, all these designers work hard to give the club owners the lighting looks that bring energy to the room, using control that the club's personnel can easily use. It is a market that demands a lot of considerations be balanced before final choices are made.

Popular Articles

- 50 Powerful People: The Top Ten (http://livedesignonline.com/concerts/0302-fifty-powerful-people/?imw=Y)
- LIV Nightclub In Miami | Breathes New Life Into The Billion-Dollar-Renovated Fontainebleau Hotel | Feb 2009 (http://livedesignonline.com/venues/liv_nightclub_miami_0209/?imw=Y)
- Scharff Weisberg Lights Up Times Square On New Year's Eve (http://livedesignonline.com/stagingrental/scharff_weisberg_times_square_new_years/?imw=Y)
- Barco Acquires Element Labs (http://livedesignonline.com/news/barco-acquires-element-labs-0317/?imw=Y)

Back to Top (#container)