



The Consultant Question

Plus: Radiohead on Conference

DEAR RADIOHEAD,

We're a small but growing community, and we want to bring our police and fire communications into the 21st century. Our city fathers have told us that there's money available if we can justify our requests. What resources are there to help us?

CONCERNED SUPERVISOR

DEAR CONCERNED,

There are so many issues that must be considered before you proceed. First of all, how much money is available? Can you afford the Hummer or the Scion? (Remember when we compared Cadillacs and Volkswagens? Now, they cost the same.) What exactly is your system lacking? Do you need a forklift to replace everything, or do you just need upgrades? What do your neighboring communities do for communications? Do you have (cue trumpets here) interoperability with those neighbors? What do your guys and gals in the field think they need? What do your dispatch personnel think they need? How will you support and maintain the new systems after you get them? Can your bean counters find enough money for everything on your wish list?

If these questions seem overwhelming, then the best approach may be to hire a consultant. I know some of you think *consultant* is a dirty word, but a qualified consulting firm might be the best approach. (By the way, you might have to hire a consultant to write the RFP for hiring a consultant.)

Once, at an APCO conference, I heard a consultant start a presentation by saying: "A consultant is someone you hire to tell you what time it is. After you agree to a price and sign the contract, he borrows your watch, tells you the time and sends you the bill." In one respect, there's some

truth to this comment.

The first thing a consultant has to do is take a deep look into what your agency has and then he can determine where it should go. Whatever you do in the future, you'll usually realize that the cost of hiring that consultant was insignificant when compared to the total cost of your project. A consultant may even save you more money than their cost. *Remember:* Choose a consultant with experience in the specific areas you're looking to enhance.

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Recommendations from customers who had similar work done are probably the best indicators of a consultant's abilities.

DEAR RADIOHEAD,

We are a small department of a county government. We have only a dozen radios, and now we've been told by our county radio department that because of a government-mandated process called rebanding we will lose our channel. What's up?

PANIC PARKS PERSON

DEAR PAN,

You are not losing your channel. It is being changed. Apparently your radio gurus haven't kept you informed about what's been happening here since 2004. Rebanding, simply put, will eliminate a lot of interference to 800-MHz radio systems. Don't panic! At worst your radios will be out of service for a few hours when they change the frequencies. At best, if you're like a lot of other small departments and are using hand-me-down radios, you could get brand new radios.

THE 'SHOW'

This year's APCO Conference & Exposition was another APCO success story. I saw lots of new and some very innovative products on the show floor. You'll probably be reading about them shortly (see "Hot Products 2008," p. 26). But the most impressive part of the conference wasn't on the exhibit floor. It was on the stage.

I'm not one to listen to the motivational speakers or pat-on-the-backers that one usually sees at some of the "Super"-sessions, but this year's keynote speaker was riveting. General Honoré was, by far, the best speaker I've ever heard at a keynote address. Aside from his down-to-earth language and his great sense of humor, he made significant points related to handling disasters. I've actually posted two of his comments in my office. First, "If all your communications are working, then you don't have a disaster; you have an inconvenience." Second, "When you have a disaster, stay off the damn phone." Thank you, General Honoré.

Also, no one has yet answered my last show question: Which manufacturer's shopping bag said, "Guesswhosbag"? *The second clue:* The bag had red and black stripes. The first person to answer correctly will get all the fame and glory attached to having his or her name mentioned in this column. **||PSC||**

Editor's note: The opinions expressed herein are those of the columnist and do not necessarily reflect the views of APCO International.

TELL IT TO RADIOHEAD ~

Got a question for Radiohead? Wanna sound off about an issue? Put it in an e-mail to PSCeditor@apointl.org.

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