

Banking On Sound

by Joshua Bachrach

In the summer of 2000, Bainbridge Design of Portland, OR, contacted Michael R. Yantis Associates, an acoustical consulting firm, with a rather complex project. Wells Fargo Bank in Tacoma, WA was running into problems with the sound in its main lobby. The high-rise building the bank is located in is one of the more historic in Tacoma and serves the dual function of housing the bank's private and public businesses. These private and public sectors of the bank are open to the same ceiling, but they are separated by acoustical dividers. Unfortunately, the initial design of the building and the passing of time conspired to undo the effects of these dividers. Conversations were carrying from one area of the bank to another.

Steve Gigobeur, an acoustical consultant at Yantis, knew immediately that sound masking was the best way to diffuse the bank's difficulties.

Unfortunately, the design of the building was not very conducive to sound masking. Gigobeur said that Wells Fargo wanted him to understand that maintaining the existing look of the building was "absolutely critical to this design." Gigobeur continued, "This was a bit of a problem because the ceiling has nearly 2,000 cubes that serve as lighting fixtures. The cubes are arranged in a



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huge array evenly spaced apart" and are one of the lobby's most distinctive features.

While these cubes are aesthetically pleasing and provide excellent lighting, they formed a major roadblock for Gigobeur. "The difficulty," he said, "was putting in a sound masking system on this ceiling. Usually, you put sound masking through a drop ceiling. At the bank, the light fixtures block this area off."

Faced with the conundrum of knowing that sound masking was the best solution for his client's problems and realizing that traditional means of

installing sound masking would not work, Gigobeur searched for a potential solution. After a good deal of exploration, he found his answer.

"The solution," Gigobeur said, "was the TOA F-121 CM loudspeakers. They had just about the perfect form to fit between the lighting fixtures 18 feet above the floor." Additionally, Gigobeur noted that TOA's F-121 CM loudspeakers provide excellent frequency response and uniform sound distribution. In short, because of their size and performance, these were the perfect speakers for this sound masking

project.

Gigobeur said that the installation was also hindered a little by the building's light fixtures. "Access was a bit of a problem," he said. But once the wiring was installed, the only challenge left was maintaining the initial appearance of the fixtures. This was done quite simply by painting the speakers the same color as the lighting fixtures. "They did a very good job," Gigobeur said. "The loudspeakers actually recede visually into the background."

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