Call to Members – May 2021

A Guide to Voice Alarm (VA)

Introduction

During my tenure as President, I have attended trade shows in my official capacity and made it my mission to listen to our membership. A re-occurring theme from Firex and events since, has been the erosion of Voice Alarm System principles from the original intent following the Kings Cross and Hillsborough disasters.

I came to the conclusion that many colleagues in the industry believe that it has lost its way over time, with the explosion of technology and other commercial interests. Of course, this will happen, as those of us that remember the inception of the industry retire unless the original intent is preserved. The fundamental principle of a VA system was always "integrity" which means that it will work under the most adverse of conditions to save lives. On a system level, this was achieved by not allowing a single point of failure, hence redundant equipment.

Today, we have product on the market that is EN54 certified that is a world away from the original intent of integrity, for example, systems that allow shared components across zones.

Having listened to our Members' concerns and watching the apparent erosion of the standards during my career, I thought that it is about time that we have a published document that preserves the original intent and that this guide should be authored by our learned body, the ISCVE.

Who should read this guide?

Everyone listed explicitly such as legislators, standards authors, manufacturers, installers etc.

Why they should read this guide?

To raise awareness of the erosion of standards by companies engaged in supplying and installing public safety equipment.

Why ISCVE should write the guide?

As the UK's learned body for audio and electro-acoustic engineering, ISCVE is ideally placed to do this and of course, ISCVE would have total control over what would be produced. Rather like the original BS7827, the guide could start as an ISCVE document and offered to BSI. I believe that the Institute should clearly define what a voice alarm system IS, leaving no room for grey areas and even go so far as to say what is NOT acceptable.

The Brief and Scope

ISCVE need to draw up and agree a brief and scope for the document.

It is my belief that we should use the resources within the Institute to contribute to this guide and I am confident that we can secure contributions from manufacturers, designers and consultants.
The scope is still to be defined but a start would be to have the following sections:

•   History
•   Original Standards
•   Current Standards
•   Minimum requirements of a VA System
•   Unacceptable interpretations of current standards
•   Future work for Standards

Of course, this requires some refining and all contributions are welcome, as always.

Authorship

The idea would be to follow a BSI type format (or one that could be readily changed) and potentially offer the guide to BSI.

This would be an ISCVE publication, and as such, no individuals will be listed as contributors. For information, BSI does not list contributors to standards.

BSI have published Expert Commentary in the past and I would like to hope that they would do so moving forward.

Timescales

I would anticipate the following timescales from conception to publishing:

3 months   : Initial draft

1 month   : for comment

1.5 months   : for changes

1.5 months   : for final comment and editing

2 months   : for formatting and publishing

If these timescales are met, publication could tie in with ISCVEx 2022.

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<u>**President**</u>