



***The Show Must Go On  
as UTL Cable  
Top London Theatres in  
Record Time***



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**Katy Rayner - Really Useful Theatres**

Hubbell Premise Wiring registered installer Universal Technology won a standing ovation from IT manager Katy Rayner when it slotted the installation of a new cabling system around performances in ten West End theatres and slashed a week off the schedule.

Over the last hundred years, Stoll Moss Theatres has developed into London's leading theatre operator running ten West End theatres which welcome over 3.5 million people every year. The company also runs a 24-hour box-office with a 40-seat call centre, provides a ticketing system for other West End theatres, and via its call centre and a web page offers theatre breaks and VIP packages. Any of Stoll Moss's theatre box offices can sell tickets to performances at any of the others by dialling into a central database over ISDN.

"IT is vital to our efforts to deliver an efficient front-office and behind the scenes service," says Rayner, "and we had decided that we needed to upgrade our systems in order to stay ahead of the game." The existing system used VAX Alpha servers and dumb terminals and although it had helped put the company centre stage, it was showing its age.

With the arrival of a new "Enta" ticketing system, Rayner decided that it was time to move to a Windows NT client-server Ethernet in order to improve the system's overall management and simplify future software upgrades. With many parts of the piecemeal system running on Category 3 cabling, it was also time to future-proof the entire system by going to Category 5. Whoever won the contract wasn't going to find it easy, though. "The theatres are like rabbit-warrens," says Rayner, "and electrical wiring diagrams aren't always available."

Rayner knew UTL from a previous stint at the British Film Institute but made sure that she had competitors lined up for the audition. "It was an absolute requirement that the winner could show me how they would work around the theatres' performances," says Rayner, "but I was also looking for more."

And she knows what won it for Universal, even though its quote was not the cheapest. "I went walkabout with Universal's Andy Hall, and was struck both by his eagerness to explore the implications of the job and his readiness to challenge my initial views about how we needed to tackle it."

The installation included 400 points at the offices and central call centre above the Gielgud and Queens Theatres in Shaftesbury Avenue. And despite work having to stop while Wednesday and Thursday matinees went ahead in the theatres below, UTL still managed to get the job finished in two rather than the planned three weeks. The Theatre Royal Drury Lane also presented particular challenges because of its listed status, but by using repeaters to extend cable runs, UTL maintained the building's fabric. The contract also called for 150 points at Stoll Moss's Manor House HQ in Soho Square.

"Perhaps the best compliment I can pay Universal," says Rayner, "is that the workmanship is so good that few people are aware of what they did. While our theatres have retained their individual character and quiriness, I'm pleased to say that they are also far more neatly integrated nodes on the corporate network."

Like all Hubbell registered installers, UTL was backed by Hubbell Premise Wiring's labs in Bedford, which check the test results from all installations for performance compliance before issuing a 25-year guarantee.