

Technical general planning: why a single point of contact for AV, lighting and safety reduces costs

CMY Brand Solutions – Whitepaper

The invisible cost driver in project work

In architecture and trade-fair/event projects, people talk about budgets, floor area, design and technology. What almost no client or project lead factors in: **interfaces between trades are among the biggest cost drivers**. It's not the luminaires, loudspeakers or cables that blow budgets—it's the lack of coordination between parties.

This is where **technical general planning** comes in. One specialist planning office takes overall responsibility for all technical trades—from AV and lighting through electrical to safety-critical systems like fire detection (BMA) and voice alarm (SAA). Instead of five contacts, there's one. Instead of conflicting specifications, there's an integrated concept.

A patchwork of trades

In reality, projects often look like this:

- The architect commissions a lighting designer for architectural lighting.
- The event agency brings in an AV office for media and sound.
- A classic MEP/TGA office handles power and distribution.
- Fire protection and safety systems sit with an installer or fire-safety planner.

Everyone works in their own world—with their own norms, schedules and often goals. Collisions are baked in:

- Fire detectors end up where trusses with spots are planned.
- Power is designed for steady loads, not the short-term peaks of event tech.
- Sound systems meet acoustic goals—but ignore that voice alarm has priority.

What looks minor on paper gets expensive on site.

The cost trap: interfaces

10–15% extra cost from interface conflicts isn't rare; multiple construction information centres and research bodies report values in that range. In trade-fair builds it can be higher, because delays hit immediately.

Typical real-world patterns:

- **Double planning:** a section of emergency lighting is covered by both the lighting plan and the architect—both bill their scope.
- **Change orders:** a trade discovers a clash during build. Fixes must happen instantly—surcharges and stress included.
- **Coordination overhead:** the client or PM becomes moderator between trades—without the technical depth to do it effectively.

Bottom line: interfaces burn **money, time, nerves and quality**.

The technical general-planning model

Instead of five or six separate planners there's **one central point of contact**.

What the general planner does

- **Integrated design:** from concept to construction docs, all trades are planned together.
- **Interface coordination:** conflicts are identified and solved in design, not on site.
- **Tendering:** scopes are cleanly separated; duplicates are eliminated.
- **Quality assurance:** site supervision, inspections and documentation from one hand.
- **Communication:** one weekly with one planner replaces five parallel syncs.

Case study: 1,500 m² brand booth

A leading industrial company planned a 1,500 m² presence at an international lead fair-complex media, lighting, show elements and safety systems.

Originally, each trade was to be commissioned separately. Switching to technical general planning delivered:

- **12% cost reduction** versus the first estimate,
- **zero change orders** during build,
- **noticeably shorter build time** thanks to conflicts resolved upfront.

The client's project lead later summed it up: "For the first time we felt we had the technology under control-instead of the other way around."

Risks-and how to manage them

General planning isn't a magic wand; it brings its own risks:

- **Dependence on one partner:** if the general planner is unreliable, all trades are affected.
- **Breadth of know-how:** the planner needs sufficient depth across all trades.
- **Planning fees:** the fee looks higher at first because responsibility is higher.

You manage these with:

- **Qualifications** (e.g., DIN 14675 for fire detection, relevant ISO certs),
- **Clear contracts** defining services and responsibilities,
- **Early involvement**-from the concept phase.

Planning as an investment

Technical general planning is **not a cost centre-it's an investment**. It reduces complexity, demonstrably saves money and secures quality. Especially in architecture and trade-fair/event builds with tight schedules and tight budgets, a single accountable partner is often the only way to keep projects under control.

Those who shy away from general planning **save in the wrong place-and often pay a multiple later**.