

So You Want To Choose A Sound Masking System?

The most important criterion for a Facility Manager to consider when choosing a sound masking system is the quality of the sound that is being purchased.



In business we need to be able to communicate, and this communication creates noise and noisy offices can be distracting and unproductive. As our office environments must often support both heads down work and interaction simultaneously we must incorporate acoustical and design solutions to make this possible.

Facility managers often turn to sound masking providers to incorporate sound masking systems into their facilities in order to achieve the dual objectives of providing speech privacy while supporting communication and collaborative work. Today, there are a number of system types and manufacturers but not a lot of information on how to decide which system to use or what criteria to set for each system.

It is critical to understand that the most important criterion when choosing any sound masking system is the quality of the sound that is being purchased.

Most sound masking companies can demonstrate their product's sound quality by providing you access to a client walk through. Masking sound is the easy part; but maintaining speech privacy and having a comfortable environment to listen to are the more nuanced aspects of a quality sound masking system. Case in point, a working lawn mower in your space could easily provide speech privacy but is certainly not a comfortable sound to listen to.

Since the "sound" is your consumable, be certain to make sure that you listen to it. Look for a sound masking system that has a smooth, non-directional, uniform sound with no recognizable repeats.

Once you've got a quality sound, consider how you want to access the systems, when done right your sound masking system should not require any on-going maintenance or tuning. The beauty of the product is that it blends with your environment and makes the space more *comfortable*. Constant adjustments to the system, similarly to turning up and down the lights in the space, would fatigue occupants. It is best for most facility managers to adopt a "set it and forget it" mentality when using a masking system. One of the best systems for this type of application are **in-plenum, decentralized systems**.

However, if you are interested in a masking system that you can manage, adjust, and tie into your existing building systems, look for a **networked sound masking system**. This type of system will enable you to access the sound masking to make adjustments via a network connection. Some systems even provide you with both on-site and off-site adjustment capabilities. When looking at networked systems, make sure that the system does not require any proprietary software or equipment. You never want to be "locked in" to a sole vendor or supplier when it comes to the ability to change your sound masking system.

Lastly, there are **direct-field sound masking** systems. These systems deliver sound directly into a space much like paging systems have done for decades. These systems are most useful for spot treatments or when ceiling or site conditions prevent you from using an in-plenum speaker, such as when a gypsum ceiling is present. The sound is more directional with this type of system and the speakers must be placed closer together than when using an in-plenum system. The sound quality of direct field speakers can not match an in-plenum system. Therefore, when comparing systems understand that direct field and in-plenum systems are worlds apart in their sound quality and tuning capabilities, so an apples to apples comparison will be difficult.

Finally, whenever incorporating sound masking into an environment it is important to manage the expectations for your sound masking solution. Understanding the difference between achieving proper "speech privacy" and "speech confidentiality" in your environment are important considerations. It is helpful to manage your occupant's expectations when it comes to what masking can and can not do within a particular space.

When the right system is chosen, sound masking will reduce distractions and create a more productive and acoustically comfortable space in which to work.

For more information, please visit
www.lencore.com

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About Lencore Acoustics Corp.

Lencore Acoustics Corp. offers a full range of sound masking systems and products that include open platform, multi-drop networked, remote controlled, centralized, decentralized, stand-alone, in-plenum, and direct field sound masking, music and paging systems.

Lencore delivers the highest quality sound masking and paging available and is the only system in the industry manufactured with E-Sound® (environmentally friendly sound) and IndePage® technologies.

Lencore is committed to providing energy efficient and sustainable products that meet the acoustical needs of Fortune 500 companies around the world.

Lencore Acoustics Corp. is headquartered in Woodbury, New York. Its principals have over 40 years of acoustical expertise, with over 125 million square feet of sound masking installations nationwide.

More information about Lencore can be found at www.lencore.com.



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